





PRESENTED

To *Hellie Cook*

FOR ATTENDANCE AT THE

PORTSMOUTH

Presbyterian Sabbath School,

Every Sabbath of the year 18 69

CHILDREN'S BOOK
COLLECTION

LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Children's Books





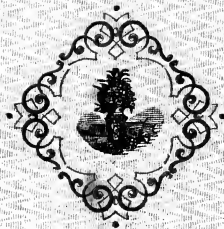


Jenny and her Geranium. Page 9.

JENNY'S GERANIUM.

OR, THE

Prize Flower of a London Court.



BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY HENRY HOYT,
No. 9 CORNHILL.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE GERANIUM 5

CHAPTER II.

A MOTHER'S LAST WORDS. 15

CHAPTER III.

THE GERANIUM IN BLOOM. 26

CHAPTER IV.

UPAS-TREE BLOSSOMS 38

CHAPTER V.

DEADLY NIGHTSHADE. 48

CHAPTER VI.

GERANIUMS IN FULL BLOOM 58

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG SUNDAY	73
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

FLOWER-SEED IN CHALLONER'S COURT	86
--	----

CHAPTER IX.

THE GERANIUM IN DANGER	99
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER X.

RENT-DAY IN CHALLONER'S COURT	113
---	-----

CHAPTER XI.

COMING TO HIMSELF	125
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHOLERA IN CHALLONER'S COURT	135
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLOWER SHOW	146
---------------------------	-----

JENNY'S GERANIUM.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE GERANIUM.

Oh! but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet,
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet!
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want,
And the walk that costs a meal!

IT was Saturday evening, in June, in Challoner's Court; the spot thus designated being a ruinous lot of houses within a mile of St. Paul's Churchyard, and renting at least at three-and-sixpence a room. Who, or what, or where "Challoner" was, nobody in the court knew. The majority, however, inclined to the opinion that the name denoted a

very miserly individual, and in this belief they had applied to Challoner the expressive cognomen of "Old Screw." As one walked up the court on the Saturday evening on which our story commences, it would have been better every way to have believed that there was no human being going by the name of Challoner owning that property, and renting it out for at least three-and-sixpence a room, and as much more as he could get. There are many stifling courts in London, where King Dirt reigns in deadly despotism, but no court or alley was more obsequious to the tyrant, and paid larger revenues to him, than Challoner's. It was a very mystery of filth, wretchedness, and disease; and if Challoner really was "a person," and lived, as some confidently gave out, in a snug little villa at Dulwich, I would willingly have inflicted upon him the penalty of residing in his own court, especially during the dogdays, until he had learned to be ashamed of himself

for taking nothing lower than three-and-sixpence a week from poor human creatures for a room in such a den of misery ; or, better still, until he had pulled the abomination down, and put up decent dwellings in its place.

What kind of people live here ? you ask. Well, as a rule, those poor creatures who must live somewhere, and who crawled in here because they had no other hole into which to creep. It was well that they had not much furniture, perhaps, because of the limited accommodation afforded for it. Challoner, seemingly, placed the most implicit confidence in the honesty of his tenants ; for there was scarcely a lock to a door, or a door to a cupboard. As Challoner himself, however, lost nothing by this open and trustful arrangement, but occasionally came in for a lock or a bolt which a timorous lodger would put on, he continued to encourage it by doing absolutely nothing to “improve” his detestable property. It was

taken for granted that Challoner's tenants had been imported from a country where water was neither a necessary nor a luxury ; for a very limited supply was served out in the morning, and before night it was not fit to use. Garden-ground there was none, either front or back ; and when " a bit of washing " was done, the width of the court allowed about six feet of clothes-line for hanging out and drying processes.

There was not much washing done, however, in this dirty fever-breeding place, even on Saturday evening. Scores of children, in every stage of rags and wretchedness, were screaming, playing, crying, and rolling on the flagstones in front of their dwellings. Low-browed, pale-faced laborers, whose countenances seemed to tell of a world where the light of sun, moon, and stars had never shown, were smoking at the windows, and the smoke was so rank and foul, that one might have been

pardoned for thinking that the general corruption of the place had taken fire. Women were scolding at the top of their voices in every kind of brogue. The atmosphere of the place, physically and morally, was hot and stifling, and as you walked up the court, inbreathing its noxious gases, you felt that it was almost an impossibility for people to be good in such a place ; and yet, more than six hundred families quarrelled here by day and slept here by night, occasional visitors greatly wondering that they did not behave better.

The sun was setting, and casting a reddened glow even on Challoner's Court, when a girl of fourteen years of age appeared at the door of one of the houses, and looked anxiously up and down the narrow alley. The glory of the sunset gave additional beauty to her pleasing features, and imparted a certain grace to the child's threadbare appearance. One glance at Jenny Sandford, as she stood at the door this

Saturday evening, involuntarily compelled a second, and immediately suggested the inquiry, "How comes such a child here amid such surroundings?" She was dressed in a faded black gown, and her shoes were well-worn and patched. As you looked a second time at her face, you saw clearly enough that hunger was imprinting its sharp, hard letters all over it, and her bare arms pathetically suggested that very little in the way of food came within their reach. For fourteen years of age she was tall and well formed, yet there was an almost infantine expression about her face, so small were her features; if we except her large lustrous brown eyes, which this evening looked only too ready for tears. Seen anywhere else, perhaps Jenny would not have excited the attention which her appearance in Challoner's Court imperatively demanded. She was the personification of cleanliness and neatness in a world of general disorder, want, and misery. Her brown hair

fell in childish ringlets on her shoulders—a most unusual sight in Challoner's Court, where “the shock head” was quite a regal institution—and her hands were white and delicate. There was a softened, thoughtful look upon the child's little face, a shy quietness about it, which seemed strangely out of keeping with a place where women fought at times like raging furies, where girls of ten knew as much as women of twenty, and where coarseness and brutality were exhibiting themselves night and day.

That narrow court, into which the all-loving nature found it difficult to bring its shining beams, was not a spot favorable to the recollection of pleasant country scenes and associations; yet, as Jenny, with slightly crimsoned, upturned face, vainly endeavored to catch a glimpse of the burnished west, her imagination was vividly painting for her the sunsets which she used to look at in her own old home in the country, when she was happy in the love of a mother,

now no longer here, and of a father who was then all that the fondest wish of a child could desire. Standing there within the dingy doorway of an old, rotting house, she thought, Somewhere the sun is setting in glory in the impurpled sky, flushing the rivers which all day have been gleaming like silver threads through green fields, and spreading a softened grandeur over hill and valley. A few miles out, she thought, there were pleasant cottages crowned with honeysuckle, and poor men's gardens which the setting sun would make radiant and beautiful. A few miles out, and soon the nightingale would be heard in the woods pouring forth its rich song without words; white butterflies would be keeping up their mazy dance in the still summer night; and the gentle breeze would be fragrant with the perfumery of wild flowers and the growths of many fruitful fields.

The passionate longing of the child "to breathe the breath of the cowslip and primrose

sweet," was enhanced by the sight of a splendid geranium which was in full bloom in the window behind her, and on which she every now and then threw a loving and rapturous look, as if the plant was a cherished companion, to whom she confided her thoughts and feelings, and who responded to them in an eloquent language all its own. It was a touching sight to see such a flower blooming in so arid a desert as Chaloners' Court; and from the manner in which the young girl regarded it, it was plain that the geranium was one of the pleasures of her life, and had a history belonging to it in which a great deal of tenderness lay hidden.

Casting another look towards the entrance of the court — it had but one — Jenny, with a sigh, retreated from the door, and sat down in that small, dingy cell, which formed her father's bedroom and living room. It was a very dingy den indeed; but unlike many of the other tenements in the court, it was kept as clean as its

vile arrangements would allow. The grate was badly set, but it was filled with a pretty summer ornament, and on a rickety table there were patterns of a similar character, and materials for paper ornaments, and paper flowers not yet made up. The floor was rotten and broken in many places; but the boards were not, as in many of the other houses, so covered with dirt as to look like earth. In a corner of the room was a heap of clothes, which formed her father's bed, and this was packed together as tidily as possible. A chair or two, a few pieces of crockery, and two or three cooking utensils completed the inventory of articles in the poor room in which I first saw Jenny Sandford and her magic geranium; and as she sits down snipping away at her work, and ever and anon watching and fearing a coming footstep, her little history, up to this eventful Saturday evening, can be told in a few words.

CHAPTER II.

A MOTHER'S LAST WORDS.

She is not here ; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And, ghastly, through the drizzling rain,
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

FOR several years John Sandford did well in his occupation of foreman to a builder. He had received a good education, was well up in "quantities," and handy at working drawings. He was a reliable, and an obliging, and always a good-tempered man, and had the gift—a rare endowment for a man whose life was spent amidst cross tempers and headstrong wills—of making crooked things straight, of quelling quarrels, and keeping things right among the men. He had early married the girl of his choice, and, blessed with one lit-

the girl, the Jenny of our story, his home was as bright as peace and contentment could make it, for about ten years. Jenny's mother was a gentle, Christian woman, and had early learned the secret of making those about her happy. Quiet in speech, cheerful in look, and a quick discerner of those little things which either make or mar the serenity of a household, she went through her domestic duties with a noiseless ease and regularity which made work appear like so much music. Her greatest charge by day was her child, and in the evening the delight of her life was to make for her husband, in his home, a thorough contrast to the work of the day. The education of Jenny was an unfailing source of pleasure to her, and it was with a joy too big for words, that she saw the child's mind opening like a flower in the sunlight, beneath the good and holy influences which directly and indirectly surrounded her budding life.

So things went on for ten years, when the cloud of trouble, though no bigger than a man's hand, appeared in the peaceful horizon of John Sandford's life. He had saved a considerable sum of money for one in his position, and was looking forward to the day when he could in a small way set up in business for himself. In an evil hour, however, he was persuaded "to become surety for a friend," and in less than three months from the day he had signed his name, the "friend" had decamped to the colonies, and John Sandford was ruined so far as his savings were concerned.

This was a heavy blow; but after staggering under it for a little while, inspired by the patient, uncomplaining courage of his wife, he set himself to work harder than ever, and recovered his spirits, if he did not recover his property. He was thus regaining cheerfulness and hope when matters went wrong in the building trade. "Strikes" became the order of the day, and

ere long "hard times" set in both for masters and men. John Sandford's employers failed, and for several dreary weeks there was "nothing to do." Thinking that business might be brisker in London, after duly weighing chances for and against the step, John sold off, left his peaceful home in the country, and came to the great city. He took humble but respectable lodgings for his wife and child, and then began with unwearied industry to seek for employment. But the "lock out" was general, and no work was to be obtained.

Then John Sandford gave way. He took to drinking; became a changed, sullen, and angry man, and people who knew him in early life would have hardly recognized him. His slender stock of money was soon exhausted, and gradually all the little cherished nicknacks which he had brought with him from his country home, and even articles of clothing, were sold to find him drink, and his wife and child a little

food! The grief of Jenny and her mother was beyond description, as they witnessed this distressing change in one who had so long been their joy and pride. With a piteous anxiety, but without uttering one word of complaint, and busily plying needle and thread to gain ever so poor a livelihood, the wife kept up for about three years; and then hunger and grief had done their work, and she laid herself down to die.

One evening John Sandford returned to his gloomy dwelling in Challoner's Court, to which place of residence they had for some time been reduced, and it happened that he was a little more sober than usual. Years afterwards he thanked God at least for that! It was a beautiful summer evening, but there was little of its peace and fragrance in that close, heated room. On a bundle of rags in a corner of the apartment the wife, in the last stage of consumption, was stretched out on the ground. It was no

new sight to the drunkard, but this evening it smote him with a strange bitterness. Kneeling by her mother, supporting her head with her frail little arm, was Jenny, whose tears were falling fast. Also kneeling by that bundle of rags which formed the death-bed of his wife, John Sandford saw "Blind Maggie," as she was called, an aged widow, who occupied the back room of the floor on which his dreary room was situate. "Blind Maggie" had somewhere obtained a large bunch of wall-flowers, which she was gently waving to and fro.

"Husband, dear," said a gentle voice, "come here; I want to speak to you."

Oh, what a cry was that which came wailing forth from the lips of John Sandford as he heard this simple appeal! There was something in it which in a moment took him back to his marriage morning, which caused the happiness of his earlier years to flash before him with the quickness of a dream.

“Come here, dear,” said his wife once more, weaker than before. John staggered to his feet, and, with a great sob, he was the next moment burying his face in the clothes which covered his dying wife.

“John, dear,” she said, gently playing with his hair, “it has come at last.”

“Oh! don’t tell me that you are going to die, Jane. I can bear any thing but that; don’t tell me that.”

“I am sure of it, dear,” she quietly said. “I have thought so for a long time, but I am sure of it now, and I am so glad you are at home.”

There was a pause, during which the child had resigned her place to her father, and it was his hand that now supported his wife’s dying head.

“It seems like old times, John, to have you near me again. Oh! you were such a good, dear husband and father in those old times, John.”

The tears fell down her face, but there was a serenity on it too, as the dying woman thought of the past; and seemed to be altogether unmindful of the present. Her husband could not speak, but wept as if his heart was breaking.

“We had such a pretty little cottage, with the honeysuckle growing over the porch, and Jenny used to be so fond of it. John, dear, I hope you will have another cottage soon, which Jenny, as she grows up, will make so pretty for you.”

“Jane! Jane! you will break my heart, as I am afraid I have already broken yours.”

“Don’t say that, John; I was never meant to make old bones; and perhaps I should have died just as soon in the country. But I am not afraid to die. If I could only go out of the world feeling that things would change for the better with you, I could go away in peace.”

She raised herself a little; and then, in an

earnest whisper, asked him, "Shall it be so, John? It will be very hard for you to break free from the evil habit which has taken such strong hold upon you for the last two or three years; but you used to believe in Jesus, and in His power to make people victorious over themselves and their sins. Shall it be so, John?" There was no answer. "Think of what Jenny will be by herself, John, in this sinful city."

Blind Maggie rose from her kneeling posture, gently groped her way to the head of the bed, and bringing her colorless face close to that of the dying woman, said with a trembling voice, "Jenny shall never be left alone, dear woman."

'Twas all the blind woman had to offer; no more, perhaps, than the two mites, all she had; but the offering brought a marvellous comfort to the dying mother's heart.

"Oh! thank you, Maggie, thank you a thousand times," she said, kissing her hand. "John, dear," she went on, "you don't speak to me;

perhaps it is better so ; but you will think of my question, and answer it when I am gone ? ”

“ Yes ! oh, yes ! ” cried her husband.

She kissed him, and gently asked to lie down, for she felt as if she could sleep a little. It was the sleep that in this world knows no waking. Challoner's Court was resounding with shouts and screams, but she took no notice of them, absorbed, perhaps, by a vision of the King in his beauty, and of the land which is very far off. She slept on through the close summer night, her husband still supporting her head, and Jenny watching every breath. Just after the turn of midnight she awoke, and there seemed a supernatural stillness in the room.

Fixing her large bright eyes on her husband, she said, in a stronger voice than usual, “ Shall it be so, John ? ”

Jenny bent down and kissed her many, many times.

A smile of heavenly sweetness flashed all over

the features of the dying woman as she said, "Father is going to be so good, dear, — so good," and then she died.

Jenny's mother had been dead about twelve months at the time when the reader is introduced to Challoner's Court, where the geranium is in full bloom.



CHAPTER III.

THE GERANIUM IN BLOOM.

Earth to earth, dust to dust, the solemn priest hath said ;
So we lay the turf above thee now, and we seal thy narrow bed ;
But thy spirit, mother, soars away among the faithful blest,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest !

JOHAN SANDFORD did not keep his word. We cannot pause to enter into the casuistry by which it became easy for him to forget and to forego the promise he had made to his dying wife. Inclination is a very powerful logician, and inclination became his guide. Shortly after his wife's death, he became a more intemperate man than ever. It was with a kind of bitterness in his heart that soon after he became a widower he saw matters righting themselves in the building trade, and work becoming plentiful. He took a place with an angry, bitter feeling in his soul ; think-

ing how much he would have valued such a chance when he came to London after work, but caring little about it now that his wife was gone. He earned good wages, and he squandered them in drink, and night after night his child was left to herself while he made merry at the "Grapes," a somewhat notorious tavern in the neighborhood of Challoner's Court. So degraded did he at length become, and so lost to parental tenderness, that he not only spent his own earnings, but the few pence which Jenny was enabled to make by the sale of her paper ornaments. Into the mysteries of this craft the child had been initiated by Blind Maggie, who earned a scant livelihood by knitting stockings, comforters, purses, and all kinds of knickknacks. Every morning Jenny conducted Maggie to her "shop," as she called the street corner where she was permitted to have a stall. Here she went on knitting and netting, selling her goods, and getting orders for others from her regular

customers, remaining at her post until she was fetched home by Jenny in the evening. Maggie had kept her word to the child's dying mother, and Jenny was to her as a daughter, sharing her room by night, keeping it tidy for her by day ; marketing for her, and performing numerous other little acts of kindness. Often had the aged widow hushed her to rest like an infant, when, terrified almost out of her senses, she had rushed out of the way of her father when infuriated by drink. Often did she talk to the orphan of the better country where the eyes of the blind are opened and the tongues of the dumb break forth in song ; and at such times it somehow seemed to the child that the spirit of her dead mother was not afar off, but was permitted to descend into the dingy room where she had endured so much grief and pain, and to leave a radiance in it and a sense of calm blessedness which even the bitter distractions of her young life did not wholly dispel.

A gentle step in her room made Jenny look up from her work. "What, Maggie!" she cried, "who brought you home? you are before your time."

"Well, I had sold all out," said Maggie, "and Mat Freeman, who was passing, offered to bring me to the court, and so I came." The widow didn't tell Jenny that one reason of her coming home was anxiety about herself, because she feared the child would have nothing to eat until she returned.

"I shall get jealous of that great giant, Mat Freeman, whom you so often tell me about," said Jenny, cheerfully, "if he takes my work out of my hands."

"No one can do that," replied the widow, tenderly; "but I sold all your work as well as my own, and so I thought I had better come home, because there's to-morrow's dinner, to say nothing of to-night's supper."

"Oh! I am not hungry," said Jenny, "thank

you, Maggie ; besides, there's Monday's rent to be thought of." It was very touching to see one so young, old enough to know what real anxiety meant about such a matter as paying rent ; but if Jenny had not saved and contrived for it many times, her father would have been turned out from his room, miserable though it was.

" And how does the geranium look to-night, Jenny ? I cannot see you, but I am sure you can hardly help springing up to go and see."

" Maggie," said Jenny, " I only wish you could see it ! There never was such a scarlet bloom. Mat Freeman ought to come and see it. I long to thank him for the pleasure he has given me many times during the last few months by sending me this plant. It was very good of him. O you pretty, pretty, flower ! " said Jenny, standing up to have a better look at it, and speaking to it as if it was a child. " I have watched you grow from day to day. I

saw you preparing for your first bud ; and when, one morning, I saw you open almost before my eyes, I could have cried for joy. I wish all poor people kept flowers ; they would do them so much good, the patient, gentle little things ! Do you know, Maggie, what I call mine ? ”

“ What,” said Maggie, smiling.

“ The lovely Mat,” said the child.

“ Mat is as good as he is big,” said Maggie, laughing, “ and I can’t say any thing better of him ; but I don’t think he is very lovely. He is coming to see whether your geranium can go to the flower show. ‘ Who knows,’ he says, ‘ whether it may not get a prize ? ’ ”

“ It deserves a prize, Maggie, for all the comfort it has given me in attending to it and watching it ; but I fear the only prize it will get will be to be sold one of these days ; it has had one or two narrow escapes for twopence, I assure you.”

“Twopence!” cried Maggie, indignantly. “I should like to see the person that dared to sell it for twopence.”

She stopped, for a step well known to both of them now came up the court, and in the next moment John Sandford entered the room.

“O father!” said Jenny, springing up, “I am so glad you have come home. I will soon get tea.”

His face was flushed, his eyes had an excited look and from other signs it was evident that he had been drinking freely. Jenny was terribly afraid of him when he was in this state, but she did not retreat from the room with Maggie this evening.

“I don’t want any tea,” he said, sullenly, “and I only came home to say I am going out again.”

“Father! father!” pleaded Jenny, with tears, “don’t go out again to-night; don’t, there’s a good, dear father; think what we have to pay on Monday.”

“I don’t care about Monday. I have been at work all the week, and I must have some enjoyment in a better hole than this.”

He did not pause to ask whether his child did not need a better hole than that in which to live. He did not ask whether she had had a morsel to eat throughout the day, although he knew that he had taken her last sixpence in the morning. Drink had transformed him into a sullen, selfish, cruel man.

“Have you any money?” he asked, without, however, looking her in the face.

“O father!” said the child, pleadingly, “I expected you would have brought some home. We owe more than two weeks’ rent.”

“I don’t care about the rent,” retorted the man, savagely. “I have spent what I got this week, or rather, I owed it, and I was obliged to pay it, and money I must have. Come,” he added, fiercely, “get me what your filigree work fetched to-day — I see it’s all sold; or else

I know who will be glad to give me a few pence for that flower of yours."

Jenny sprang up before her favorite as if she had been pierced with a sword. The man's cruel words had indeed entered her heart like hot iron, but drink had almost destroyed his natural affection.

"Oh, don't be so cruel!" she said, "it's my only companion in this dreary room when you are away; and, as I look at it, I think of poor mother, and how fond she used to be of flowers."

"Hush!" said her father, hoarsely: "give me the money."

Without looking at him, Jenny left the room, and presently returned, and counted out her all into his hand. "It's all I have!" she said.

She stood with clasped hands before him, the image of despair, forcibly reminding him of her dead mother. He gazed at her for a moment, as if he saw a ghost, and then turned on his

heel, and went out. Jenny listened to his retreating footsteps until they had completely died away, and then buried her face in her hands in utter woe. "O mother! mother!" she cried, "did you not say that father was going to be good? He is getting worse and worse."

"Grief, however, of this kind was no new thing to her; and after some moments of weeping, she brushed away her tears, and put on her old bonnet and shawl to go out and do Maggie's marketing for her as usual; and so experienced had she become in this work, and such a thrifty little housekeeper was she, that she made a little money go a long way. Her purchases were soon made, and presently she was again sitting in her room, and busily going on with her work.

The evening deepened into night, and Maggie had for some time retired to rest; yet still the child worked on in spite of weariness—a weariness made doubly trying by her anxiety

about her father. Occasionally she stole a look at her geranium blooming there so silently and glowingly in the night, and the sight of it brought a momentary serenity into her heart. But her grief this evening seemed heavier than she could bear. She was frightened at the fearful strength of her father's passion for drink, and knew not in what it would end. He had often, in his intoxicated moods, offered her liquor, but she felt a faintness even at the smell of it, and after one or two efforts to induce her to "taste it," he had relinquished the task. She thought of her father as she remembered him in their old home, of his love and tenderness towards her mother and herself, of his manly, generous nature until this passion had taken hold of him. Her tears fell in copious showers as recollection after recollection crowded upon her, and sinking down on her knees by the bed on which her mother had breathed her last, she put up a strong cry unto him who was

alone able to help to change her father's heart. Jenny had never felt the suspense of waiting for her father's return so keenly as this evening. It at length became unbearable, and she resolved to go out, and see whether she could induce him to return home. She had never yet been to the "Grapes," her father having strictly charged her never to come after him. Hitherto she had obeyed him, but now she felt that she could brave his utmost anger only to know that he was safe. She put on her bonnet and shawl once more, stepped quietly out of the house, hurried down the court, and did not pause until she was in the street in which the three great lamps of the "Grapes" brilliantly flared. Then her heart failed her; her face grew pale at the thought of what she would say, and she felt inclined to run home again. Summoning all her courage to her assistance, however, she advanced to the door of the tavern, pushed it open, and went in.

CHAPTER IV.

UPAS-TREE BLOSSOMS.

And the vitriol madness flushes up in the ruffian's head,
Till the filthy by-lane rings to the yell of the trampled wife.

THE "Grapes," where John Sandford and many others had been wasting the earnings of a week, and more than that, was a mixture of the gin palace and tavern. There was an imposing drinking bar, all brilliant and gay with gaudy chandeliers and lustres, to attract those who chose to drink and chat without sitting down, and there was a "good parlor" for those who wished to devote a long evening to intoxication. Behind the bar, stout Mr. Spivens grew stouter as he pocketed the money which was so freely lavished at this drinking shrine. Buxom Mrs. Spivens was

dressed in a handsome silk dress, and was bedizened with a gold chain and other jewellery, which she constantly displayed as a consolation to poor famishing wives and children. Mr. and Mrs. Spivens had had a grand night of it, Saturday evening being their fruitful harvest time. They had been for hours engaged in their pleasing task of serving out "choice compounds," "cream of the valley," and muddy and acrid drinks to which were given equally imposing names. What a contrast the glaring and gaudy bar presented to the people who stood in front of it taking their doses of poison! There was the aged dram-drinker, with paralytic hand, scarcely able to lift up the fiery spirit to his parched lips, the landlord taking good care, however, that that palsied hand should open wide enough to let the coin out upon the counter before he served him with the "cream of the valley." There were thieves, beggars, costermongers, frowsy slatternly old women,

hulking laborers, shock-haired children, bloated youth, and irreverent old age. There were cadaverous, miserable people of all ages trying to get momentary excitement from the liquor they imbibed. There were mothers giving even their babies gin, and experiencing no alarm though their little ones grew black in the face in consequence. In the background were a few anxious-looking half-starved women ever and anon plucking at their husbands' sleeves, and endeavoring to get them home. It was all in vain, however ; the passion for drink was so strong upon them that the earnings of a week were recklessly squandered. There were famished children at home, sleeping away their terrible hunger, and they would awake in the night to feel its pangs gnawing them afresh. The price of that last pint of beer would have given the poor children a loaf, and perhaps have saved them from starvation. Ought publicans to be allowed to keep up this "massacre of

the innocents" from day to day and year to year?

Here, at the "Grapes," which Jenny now entered for the first time, she saw no geranium blooming, but only the blossoms of the upas-tree, drink; and this Saturday night they were in their fullest and brightest flower.

Such was the scene on which Mr. and Mrs. Spivens looked forth with delight from behind the bar, and in proportion to the misery endured by those in front did their faces beam with satisfaction; for the misery of their victims added to the money in their till. Such was the scene in which the daughter of John Sandford found herself when she had pushed open the door of the "Grapes."

"Well, Miss, and what for you?" observed the landlord, as he noticed her pale, timid face looking inquiringly around.

"If you please, sir, I want my father," was the simple reply, putting a request which thou-

sands of the ruined children of England have made times without number to the destroyer of their homes and parents, making it not unfrequently as they stood by the side of their newly made graves.

“I want my father,” the child repeated.

Now this was a “Beggar’s petition,” that Mr. Spivens often had presented to him, and he well knew how to receive it. If a man had spent all his money, then he was only in the way at the “Grapes,” and his child or wife could not take him away too soon; but if he had not exhausted his stock, then blank unconsciousness of the existence of the person inquired after was the fitting tack for the landlord to go upon. The “Grapes” would never flourish if children were to be encouraged to come with piteous faces asking for their fathers. Mr. Spivens accordingly gave Jenny no answer, but addressed himself to the more profitable task, as he considered it, of serving out gin to a new comer.

Jenny stood cowering in the midst of the strange scene already described, and soon attracted the attention of those who saw her to be new to the place. Girls of her own age surrounded her, and asked her to treat them, or to drink with them. Red-nosed old ruffians and hardened young profligates began to make their comments upon her appearance, until she was nearly fainting with terror.

“Come, come, we can’t have you loitering about after no good,” said Mrs. Spivens, shaking her black curls, which Jenny thought were like so many black snakes falling over her shoulders. Mrs. Spivens could be very blanching and fascinating when people had money to spend; but a poor girl wanting her father — there was something too prosaic in that common every-day occurrence to rouse even into momentary compassion the pinions of Mrs. Spivens’s lofty soul.

Poor Jenny’s pale, terror-stricken face, her

faded bonnet and shawl, formed no letter of recommendation to Mrs. Spivens, although she might have read in her whole appearance the words, "Drunkard's child." Frightened at the landlady's haughty looks, the child was glad when her sharp "Get along out with you, will you," gave her the impulse she needed to leave the spot. Yet she could not bring herself to leave the house; but stood outside lingering under the window of a room, on the wire blind of which "good parlor" was written. Standing on tiptoe, she peeped into the room, where, in a cloud of tobacco smoke, she saw a number of her father's fellow-workmen. She could not at first see her father, and was even beginning to hope that he was not there, when a loud shout of laughter made her start from her post of observation. Upon looking in again, she perceived, to her horror, what had occasioned that shout of merriment. Her father had fallen hopelessly intoxicated upon the floor,

and was stretched out at full length as if he was dead. In an instant Jenny had glided through the bar, and had made her way to the parlor! To kneel down by him, to undo his neckcloth, to beseech the men present for some water, to sprinkle it over his heated face, was the work of a moment. To the majority of those present the sight of a drunken man was something to make merry over, and Jenny was thunderstruck at the callousness of one after another, when she besought assistance to carry him home.

“Carry home the sot, indeed!” said one of the men; “he’d do the same for me, wouldn’t he?”

“I’ll carry him home if you’ll give me a kiss,” said another, with an impudent leer.

“Leave the girl alone, will you,” said a third.

“Who is doing any thing to her, Sparkes?”

“Why, you,” said the man thus addressed, in a thick, intoxicated tone of voice.

“You shan’t say that again,” said the other; and quicker than it takes to relate Sparkes and he were in fierce encounter.

Jenny screamed in terror, especially as the two combatants drew nearer the spot where her father was still lying insensible. Noise at the "Grapes," on Saturday night, was no unusual thing; indeed, it was the usual finish to the week's orgies. Earlier in the evening Mr. Spivens would simply have regarded an uproar as a proof of good fellowship; but as "licensing day" was coming round, and his house had been reported by the police in not the most favorable manner, it suited him, especially as the time for closing was drawing near, to take notice of the outcry in the parlor.

Mr. and Mrs. Spivens accordingly appeared at the door.

"What, that bold-faced hussy here again!" said the landlady, looking at Jenny holding her father's head. What an imagination Mrs. Spivens must have possessed to have seen a "bold-faced hussy" in the shrinking, timid Jenny.

“Come, come, I can’t have this, you know,” said the landlord, pompously, but studiously keeping out of the way of the two infuriated men, whose faces were now cut and bleeding. “This is an infraction of the law. Stop it, Sparkes, or I’ll send for a policeman.”

The mention of the name was sufficient to cause the two men to turn their anger against the landlord, who immediately retreated — his better half had done so before him — and ordered the pot-boy to go for the police.

Why dwell longer on the hideous scene! Only to say further, that when the policeman entered, the two combatants had settled their grievance, and that it was John Sandford who was taken into custody for being drunk and incapable. Jenny, with almost a broken heart, followed him as he was supported to the station, saw the door close upon him, and then returned to her desolate home.

CHAPTER V.

DEADLY NIGHTSHADE.

"The worst o' the ills that beset us, we think,
Is that curse o' the lan', the plague sore o' drink.
It poisons the sources an' streams o' oor life,
In youth an' in manhood, in mither an' wife."

IT was the first time in her life that Jenny had ever been out so late on a Saturday night, or rather so early on a Sunday morning, and the sights and sounds of the streets were horrifying to her beyond description. Above her were the calm heavens, and the quiet stars wooing her to gentle thoughts of heaven, and of the rest into which her mother had entered; but as she walked homeward it seemed to her as if the great city was the region of the lost; for the public-houses were then closing, and those who had been spending their

all without hesitation, were now, without ceremony, being turned into the streets. Ragged, decrepit, palsied, blaspheming people were to be seen and heard in all directions, and the quiet of the calm sabbath morn was rudely broken. At the door of one tavern—strange sight!—Jenny saw a handsome brougham, with coachman to match, waiting to carry the landlord to his suburban retreat. The landlord made his money out of the vices of the dirtiest and lowest of the community; but he prided himself upon being a man of taste, and could never think of sleeping amid the unwholesome fumes of his tavern, especially after a Saturday night's drinking on the premises. A publican's carriage! what a parable it is to the working men of this generation, if they had eyes to read its significance. The bitter fruits of the night's intemperance were now visible in almost every street. As the flaring gas lights in gin-palaces were extinguished, riot,

drunkenness, and impurity were turned out to run wanton. A few stragglers still lingered about taverns, entreating to be served with more liquor; some begged to be allowed to remain in the tap-room, for they had no place to which to go, and they had spent all their money.

“Ah!” cried out one who had been summarily ejected into the street, “turn me out, throw me into the river, or into the gutter — what do you care? You have cheated me, starved me, sent my wife to the grave, and then you turn me out, and go calmly to sleep after it.”

Jenny listened with a horrified interest to these words savagely spoken by a man about her father's age; they were so like the words which her own father might have spoken. Farther on, the scene which she had that evening witnessed in the “Grapes” was brought back to her mind by the sight of two women

engaged in a ferocious fight. Their dresses were torn to ribbons and their faces were bruised and bleeding; they plucked each other's hair, and tore it out in handfuls; they bit each other's arms, and were encouraged in their horrid work by a troop of savage, brutalized people, who stimulated them by their cries to keep up their butchery of each other. There was only one who trembled at all this, it seemed to Jenny, and that one was a little boy, who, sitting down on the pavement, was wringing his little hands and crying bitterly as he called out, "Oh, don't beat mother! don't beat mother!"

Farther on, young children were seen hurrying away from taverns with bottles of spirit and jugs and jars of liquor. Some of the spirit bottles had no corks in them, and the precocious children were taking sips by the way, and passing their judgment upon the strength of the liquor! Other children were

waiting at the door of gin-palaces, and kicking away with all their might to make some one come; for they knew the consequences if they went home to their infuriated parents without the bottles and jugs filled. From the public-house, as from a foul fountain-head, a filthy stream of degradation and wretchedness of every kind flowed through the great city, poisoning the sweetness of the quiet summer night. The victims of the Drink-demon might have that night said, "Our name is Legion;" they were to be seen in every street, waking up brutal violence and every kind of depravity. As she approached Challoner's Court, a terrible sight awaited Jenny. A young woman, scarcely twenty, with dishevelled hair and garments rent to pieces, was struggling in the hands of two policemen. Her screams filled the air, and her language was more horrible than her screams. A low-browed, villainous-looking man now stepped from the crowd watching this scene.

“ You let her alone ; she shan’t go to the station. I’ll put my knife into you, if you don’t let her go.”

“ Do you dare to resist me in the execution of my duty ? ” said the policeman.

“ I do mean to resist you, and twenty more besides. Come on, Sal,” he said, pulling at the girl, who was tearing and raving like a wild cat.

One of the policemen sprung his rattle, and the other, drawing his truncheon, brought it down with a heavy thud upon the head of the would-be rescuer, who was stricken to the ground. Then what a howl of execration arose from the crowd ! They pressed round the police, and endeavored by main force to drag their prisoner from them. But blow after blow fell upon the heads of the assailants, and the policemen held their captive fast until a *posse* of additional constables arrived upon the scene. The drunken girl was fastened to a

stretcher, and, followed by a hooting crowd, the police carried their burden to the station-house. A few steps farther on, and Jenny saw a little boy pulling hopelessly and helplessly at the dress of a drunken woman, who was lying in the middle of the road, ready to be crushed to death by the first vehicle that came by. "She is my mother! she is my mother!" cried the poor little fellow, as Jenny helped to bring her on to the pavement.

Tired and sick at heart, Jenny at length reached her own dreary dwelling; and, fearful of disturbing Maggie, she made up her mind to spend the night in her father's room. She lit no candle, but from habit drew her chair in front of the fire-place, and sat down to pass the dreary hours in cheerless thought. Occasionally the noise of some intoxicated person tumbling up the narrow court made her start and shiver, and she was thankful when the footsteps died away, and unbroken silence

reigned once more. The great roar of London had subsided into silence. Omnibuses, cabs, wagons, and vehicles of all kinds no longer rattled through the streets, and at last there was stillness even in Challoner's Court, and its tenants slept the sleep of the poor in the million-peopled city.

Wearied out by the excitement of the night, Jenny, without any intention of closing her eyes in slumber, fell asleep. It was a troubled sleep; and ere long the sad incidents of the night shaped themselves into a remarkable dream. She thought, in the language of Scripture, that she was in a horrible pit, where the darkness was so intense that it might be felt. She looked in every direction for the faintest ray of light through the narrowest chink; but there was neither chink nor ray. She groped about in the chilling, dismal darkness, only to pierce her naked feet against sharp stones, or to bruise her temples against

flinty projections sharper than knives. While suffering this physical torture, she was sensible also of the keenest mental distress, although she could not tell on what account. How long this agony had endured she could not tell, but while it was at its highest pitch she became conscious of a mild radiance diffusing itself throughout the enclosure in which she was imprisoned. The light grew brighter, and gently floating upon it, descended the figure of her mother. Her face wore the look usual with it when she was brightest and happiest, and in her bosom she wore a blossom of Jenny's glowing geranium. She smiled on Jenny one of her sweetest smiles; and coming nearer and nearer, threw her arms around her neck, murmuring gently, "My child, my darling child!"

Jenny woke up with a start and a shiver, and screamed with terror; for it was no dream that there were arms around her neck, and a voice gentle as a mother's was saying, "My child, my darling child!"

It was poor, blind Maggie, who, missing Jenny from her bed, had groped her way into the room where she was. Her sensitive ear soon discovered that the child was sleeping, and upon touching her found her as cold as a stone. She had gently put her arms around her, and, perhaps, in that moment had occurred Jenny's dream and her awakening.

"Come to rest, my poor child, come to rest! You shall tell me all your troubles to-morrow."

"To-morrow has begun, Maggie dear," said Jenny, with a sigh; "it is already daybreak!" and like one who dreams, with her hand in the faithful Maggie's, she laid down on the widow's humble couch as the gray dawn was breaking.



CHAPTER VI.

GERANIUMS IN FULL BLOOM.

You seek the home of taste and find
The proud mechanic there,
Rich as a king, and less a slave,
Throned in his elbow-chair.
O lift the workman's heart and mind
Above low sensual sin!
Give him a home, the home of taste,
Outbid the house of gin.



MENTION has more than once been made of a certain "Mat Freeman," and as he figures largely — largely in a double sense — in this little story, it is time that he is introduced to the reader. If Saturday night is a time of revel to the intemperate, it is not less a time of serene enjoyment to the man of sobriety; and so Matthew Freeman had found the evening which had been fraught with so much sorrow to poor Jenny. The cottage in which he lived was nothing to

boast of, as he himself said ; and he had threatened to build one of his own at a convenient opportunity. But genial good temper, thrifty management, contriving to make the best of every thing, and constant patching up and doing for himself what the landlord had often promised to do and had never done, had made the place good enough for a sturdy navvy, beyond which calling Mat had no ambition to aspire.

The special recommendation of the cottage in Mat's eyes was the bit of garden attached to it ; and this, although only a few feet square, was something inestimably precious to him. It was now bright and glowing with all kinds of flowers, in artistically arranged beds and borders. In the centre of the garden, and occupying a bed to itself, was an immense geranium, of the same kind as that which was blowing in Jenny's window. The reason of this Mat must be allowed to tell for himself, for only he can do justice to the merits of this plant. In the liv-

ing room, the window of which was open to the garden, preparations were being made for such a Saturday evening's tea as the navvy's soul delighted in, more especially as Mrs. Peters, the Bible-woman of the district, had been invited to partake of it. The table looked tempting with its large loaf, water-cresses, and slices of cold meat, and Mrs. Freeman's cheerful face was shining with the heat of the weather, and with her exertions to set her house in order. Her three children were washed and put tidy, and the little creatures had a clean Sunday look about them, and were now beseeching Mrs. Peters for one of her pretty stories; for "father" was late to-night, and as nothing was to be touched until he came in, they wanted something to divert their attention from the eatables.

A glance at the "living room" told even the most careless observer that Mrs. Freeman took as much pride in her house as Mat in his gar-

den. The walls were hung with prints, and over the mantelpiece an old violin had a place of honor to itself. The furniture was neatly arranged, and one of Jenny's brightest ornaments figured in the fireplace. There was no carpet down, for Mat had an objection to one in the summer time; but the flooring was cleaner and whiter than many a poor housewife's dresser. Mrs. Freeman had given more than one anxious glance up and down the street, wondering what was keeping her good man, as he always made a point of being home as early as he could on Saturday evening. Her anxieties were not of long continuance; for presently the children gave a shout, and the next moment Mat entered.

"Couldn't help being late, Mary, my girl," he said in a cheery voice to his wife; "something went wrong. Glad to see you, Mrs. Peters; are you hearty?" he said, shaking her by the hand.

The children were climbing about his burly legs, and as he lifted the youngest on his shoulder, Mat would have formed a fine "study" for an artist. He was, as Jenny had heard him described, a very giant of a man. His shirt-sleeves were tucked up, revealing brawny, sinewy arms, at home with the pick-axe and the spade. He wore no neckerchief, and his throat was bare, supporting a massive head, which was thatched—there's no better word—with masses of light flaxen hair. A pair of bright blue eyes shone out above cheeks ruddy with health, and, as with his disengaged hand he patted the heads of the two little ones trying to get up to his other shoulder, a great broad smile illumined his features, and his face was as pleasant as a corn-field with the sun shining upon it. He had a strong clear voice, in keeping with his great burly figure, and such hands! It almost made one afraid to see him take hold of his baby boy, a

miniature of himself as regards eyes and hair, and set him on the ground again.

“I shan’t be a minute,” he said, running out to the wash-house, from which presently sounds were heard like an engine letting off its steam, mingled with exhausted expressions of “Ah! that’s what I call good,” “One more,” and other sentiments of a similar self-satisfied character.

Mat by-and-by came back all the more comfortable for his copious ablutions, and then full justice was done to the good things on the table. During tea-time, Mrs. Peters had many anecdotes to tell of her work in the district. Daily it was her lot to come in contact with some of the most vicious and depraved people of the metropolis. She had seen that day a young mother lying on a dirty heap of rags, with a dead infant on her bosom, while her drunken husband was raving like a maniac for more gin. She had seen even the poor beds of the dying seized for rent, and children

of all ages wasting away in disease. In street after street she met with riotous, blaspheming, drunken men, women, and children.

"And yet," she said, "somehow or other, I never got a bad word from any of them."

"I should think not," said Mat.

"Of all the places I visit, however, I think Challoner's Court is about the worst; there the women seem unsexed by sin, and the men to have lost every atom of manliness. In fact, I only know two decent people in the whole court; one of them is a blind widow, and the other is an orphan child."

"Ah!" said Mat, "Maggie is an old acquaintance of mine; I often buy odds and ends of her; and as for the child, that is a piece of her handiwork," pointing to the fire-stove ornament.

"Well, I thought very often lately that that bright flower in the window of Jenny's room was some relation of yours," said Mrs. Peters, smiling.

“Yes,” said Mat, “when Maggie told me what a meek and patient little thing Jenny was, and how her poor mother had been so fond of flowers, I thought it might comfort her a bit to have one. The sad stories you have been telling us, Mrs. Peters,” continued Mat, getting up and taking down his violin, at which the children clapped their hands in glee, “reminds me keenly what *we* once were, in a worse place perhaps than Challoner’s before Mary one day took it into her head to bring home a flower; that great flower you see yonder in the middle bed all by itself.”

Mat gave rather a melancholy scrape on the violin, as if to typify the miserable past of which he had just been speaking.

“Come and take a walk in the garden,” he said, “and I’ll tell you all about it.”

To walk in the garden with father was a splendid treat to the children, and they hailed the proposal with shouts of delight. The little

patch of ground looked smaller than ever as the burly form of Mat appeared in it; but Mrs. Peters thought she had never seen a prettier sight than this great stalwart man moving about from bed to bed, and tying up a flower here and there with almost a maiden's gentleness.

"There's a pot of musk for you now, — who says it won't grow in London gardens? Look at that bed of marigolds. Here's a fuchsia for you! Would you ever think that we could get so white a bed as that amid all our smoke? Look! do look at this sweetwilliam, and at this beautiful mignonette, and at this —"

"Mat, Mat," cried his wife, laughing, "Mrs. Peters will think you the vainest fellow in all London."

"But here," said Mat, "is the monarch of the garden; this is grandmother," he said, with a laugh, as he stood by the large geranium. "Now, Mrs. Peters, if I had my hat on, I'd take it off when I begin to speak about that





flower. For why? I was a cruel husband and father once. Yes, I was, Mary, and our friend won't understand why I speak like this if she did not know that. I used to squander my earnings in drink, and my wife and children dreaded my coming home at night. We lived in a dreadful hole, and I didn't care to live in a better. But one day my wife thought we were not poor enough, and so she bought a geranium."

Mat gave a merry laugh in the remembrance of this extravagance.

"Well it was a bright day when she did so. 'It's a pity you can't make the money go faster,' I said. 'Ah! Mat,' she said, 'the flower won't eat any thing; it won't cost us any thing to keep, and it reminds me of my early days to see a flower once more.' Well, the flower was allowed to remain, and what it began to do with us I can hardly tell you. I remember the first thing it did was to make us clean the window!"

cried Mat, with a roar of laughter, as if this, of all occurrences, was the most comical which could have happened. "Yes, we actually cleaned the window that the flower might have a little light. And then by degrees the room got cleaner, and one little thing after another was bought, to keep the flower company ; and I left off going to the public, and became a teetotaller, all because of the flower ; and then I took to going to church and keeping the Sabbath, and all because of the flower. Many, many is the time that it has taught me patience, gentleness, and hope, telling me that the God who was watching it and keeping it alive, was as near to me as He was to it. By-and-by we were able to move out of the miserable den in which we had been content so long to live. I was able to take a more decent place, and by-and-by we came here. The flower has grown old now," said Mat, tenderly, "and I call it grandmother. Many is the time I have ex-

hibited it at our flower-show, and many is the fine flower I have reared from its cuttings ; but I look upon grandmother as the monarch of the garden, and as the shipwrecked sailor looks upon the life-belt which has saved him from a watery grave."

"And was Jenny's geranium a relation of grandmother?" asked Mrs. Peters, greatly interested by the simple eloquence with which the navvy had told the story of the plant.

"Yes," returned Mat, smiling, "that was one of grandmother's children. I believe in 'extending the blessings,' as our minister says. My advice to every working man who has not a decent house above his head, and who wants to get one, is very short, but I know it to be very sound."

"I know what you are going to say," said Mrs. Peters, laughing, "and I myself, in my rounds, have seen incalculable good resulting from it."

“Yes,” cried Mat, in a stentorian voice, as if he was addressing at least the entire city of London, “become a teetotaller, and keep flowers.”

The sun was now going down in the west, but spared a few of its parting beams for the honest workman's garden, and shed a golden lustre over its tastefully arranged flower-beds. It was now time for the two youngest children to go to bed, but the eldest was allowed to sit up a little longer, while his father discoursed sweet music on his old violin. He was not, to tell the truth, a very skilful player, but as he expressively said, “it pleases me, you know, and does as well for the children as if I played better.” The gentle summer night drew on apace ; but while there was still light enough to read, Mrs. Peters, taking her pocket Bible out, proposed that they should read a chapter together. This was the good woman's unfailing recipe for all kinds of sorrows and distresses,

and she had nothing better as a sanctifier of joy and gladness. "Let us read a chapter," she would say to weeping mothers, to starving and dying people, to quarrelsome and angry men. She never visited a house without the inmates expecting to hear the question before she left, "Shall we read a chapter together?" and the reading of that chapter, in numberless instances, had been as bread cast upon the waters, the results of which were found after many days. When, in a clear, quiet voice, she had read the chapter, Mat, in the most natural way, said, "Let us pray," and together they surrounded the mercy-seat, while the navvy, in softened tones, thanked God for the blessings of the week, and implored a blessing on the approaching sabbath. Such was Mat Freeman's Saturday night.

"Mrs. Peters," he said, after having bade her a cordial good-by, "when do you next go to Challoner's Court?"

“I go to-morrow afternoon,” was the answer.


“Then, if you have no objection, I should like to go with you,” returned Mat.



CHAPTER VII.

A LONG SUNDAY.

The city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning. Silent, bare
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep,
In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

UNDAY in Challoner's Court, however bright and calm the sky above, however quiet and balmy the atmosphere elsewhere, was always a day of feverish storms, of confusion and sorrow. No one was ready to greet Sunday with a song, or to call it a delight, for in truth it was the heaviest, and dullest, and saddest day of all the seven. The sun, as it rose upon the slumbering city, brought with it no glory to that crowded, filthy alley; but only made its close atmosphere

more feverish and unwholesome. The court was crowded with costermongers' barrows, fish and vegetable baskets, and glittering here and there were heaps of cinders, ashes, and garbage. A Turk would have hesitated before he allowed his dog to put foot into such a place, but a Christian legislature sanctioned the existence of such a narrow "valley of death," and counted it quite good enough for the people who were forced to live in it. The Christian legislature never paused to ask whether such a place had any thing to do with making people vicious; it never asked, Of what use are men and women to the State when all self-respect has slowly died out of them? All that the Christian legislature did, seemingly, was to protect "Challoner" in wringing three-and-sixpence a room at least, from the poor tenants every Monday morning, and to give him the power to eject them if they had not the rent ready.

It need scarcely be said that the tenants of Challoner's Court were not a church-going people. Many of them made no difference between Sunday and any other day, but worked at their calling, whatever it was, without pause. Amongst the early risers in the court were the bird-catchers; these were up with the dawn, and were off to the outlying fields, to snare, if possible, a sufficient number of birds for the shooting parties of young "gents" at a later period of the day. Others went off to the markets to buy stale fruit, questionable vegetables, and fish just as questionable. A few, very few, had money enough left from last night's orgies to purchase flabby pieces of meat, or a yellow, oily "faggot," or a pocketful of whelks and periwinkles for the day's dinner. The elder boys of the court strolled away to Shoreditch or St. Giles's, to spend the morning among the birds and bird-fanciers. The last thing any one in the court would have thought

of was going to a place of worship! When Mrs. Peters urged this upon them, two or three replied bitterly, "We are not in a state to listen to you. We have bodies as well as souls. Look at our food, our clothing, our lodgings, and see where we take rest from labor on bare boards or rags. Do you wonder that we try to lose the sense of our misery in gin? Teach us better habits, and pluck us from the hand of those who grind our poverty. Show us how we may become self-reliant, and lift us up out of our depths of woe to listen to your book."

And so the sabbath began in a sullen gloom, and shed no calming, renovating influence upon the jaded, miserable people. Some spent the morning in what beds they could call their own, others in lounging about the court and its purlieus, smoking rank tobacco; all waiting, with a drunkard's insatiable thirst and irritable nervousness, for the opening of the public-house at one o'clock. A few knew the secret

of obtaining drink within the prohibited hours ; and if they happened to have a drop of spirits left from last night's debauch, they were popular while it lasted. The court was miserable enough on other days, but the climax of misery was reached on Sunday. Now the air resounded with shrieks, and a woman would rush out bleeding, fleeing from a husband who had threatened, in his madness, to take her life. Another time it would be the children fleeing before a virago of a mother, who with stick in hand was ready to beat them within an inch of their lives. Throughout the day, the poor children, unwashed and half naked, ran hooting and screaming about the court ; their elders blasphemed and quarrelled ; and passers by, on their way to their places of worship, cast a look of horror upon the narrow avenue, as if it was one of the roads to hell, as indeed it was.

The clock of St. Paul's Cathedral boomed

heavily the hour of eight as Jenny awoke from her slumber, feverish and unrefreshed. Almost with her waking, came the bitter recollection of last night's history, and she breathed a heavy sigh. Maggie had been up some time ; she had spread a humble breakfast-table, and was now sitting in her clean white cap, which Jenny took a pride in "getting up" for her, and her Sunday dress. Her Bible was open before her, and her fingers were silently gliding over the embossed letters, and her spirit was being refreshed with the consolations of the Divine word. She looked the picture of a calm, contented, trustful old age, and the sight of such an aged saint in such a locality as Challoner's Court was inexpressibly touching.

"Well, Jenny," she said, her quick ear immediately catching her sigh ; "I didn't like to wake you, although it has gone eight : but now get up and come and have some breakfast."

"O Maggie, how good you are to me ! what should I do without you ?"

“Nay, I ought rather to say that, for what should I do without you? You keep my place tidy, and I can tell that it is so, though I cannot see; you keep my accounts for me; you—”

“O Maggie! don’t go on. Ever since poor mother’s death you have been a mother to me; you have helped me to get a living, you sell my things for me, you do every thing for me. I feel as if I ought not to take your breakfast, for you know how all my little money went last night; and what shall we do to-morrow?”

“Now, Jenny, Jenny,” said the widow, tenderly, “have I not often begged you not to meet the sorrows of to-morrow before they come? Depend upon it, to-morrow will have strength to bear its own burden, whatever it is. I have found this true throughout a long life. Trouble has always been greater when I have been thinking about what it will be, than when I have had really to bear it.”

“I wonder how poor father is this morning,” said Jenny, sorrowfully, when, after a little while, she was sitting at the table sipping the nice herb-tea, which was one of Maggie’s Sunday luxuries; “Souchong” and “Congou” were quite beyond her reach.

“Not half so bad as he ought to feel, and as I should like him to feel,” answered the widow. “There, there, child,” she went on in a more soothing tone, “I know you are crying, but I don’t mean any thing very bad; only it vexes me to think what fools men make themselves; he doesn’t deserve to have a child.”

“O Maggie, he used to be so good,” said Jenny, with a sob. “He was so different when he lived in the country, and before he took to drinking.”

“Well, my dear, it is very sad; but I know you tell your troubles to One who is able to help you. You must tell Jesus all about it.”

“I do, I do,” said Jenny, fervently.

“And so do I; I never cease to pray that your father’s heart may be changed, and that he may come to himself. You know we are taught to believe in the power of prayer under all circumstances. Our heavenly Father has ways which we know nothing of by which to bring about what is impossible to us.”

“What can I do more than I do? I often ask,” said Jenny, in a despairing tone. “Of course, if I were older, my example in not taking the dreadful drink might be of some good. But what does a man care about what a child like me does?”

“Well, Jenny, you are doing two good things; you are setting a good example, and you are asking God to bless it — there you must leave it. But now, child, put away the things, and let us have our reading.”

It was a beautiful sight, one that God’s angels looked down upon with pleasure that holy Sabbath morning, to see the blind widow

and the orphan child kneeling together in that close back room, wrestling in prayer, and gaining glimpses of the better land as they did so. Such sights, thank God ! are not uncommon in the foulest courts of the metropolis.

At the appointed time Jenny conducted Maggie to her accustomed place of worship ; as for herself, she felt that there would be no sabbath for her that day.

With a heavy heart she wended her way to the police-station to learn news of her father. On the road she met troops of well-clad children trotting, with smiles on their faces, by the side of their parents to the house of God. The church bells were ringing, the multitudes were preparing to keep holy day in the sanctuary, and the child's heart bitterly marked the contrast between her lot and those who were about to take part in the solemn assembly. Arrived at the station-house, she made known her errand to a policeman who was standing at the

door. Her woe-begone face, her wasted figure and threadbare appearance, said plainly at once, "I am a drunkard's child," and the policeman regarded her with looks of pity.

"Come inside," he said kindly; and Jenny, with some feeling of terror, gazed upon the handcuffs, the pistols, and cutlasses which were ornamentally arranged on the mantelpiece, staring her in the face as she entered.

"I want to see father, sir," she said simply, as if every one there knew him, and as if he was the only one there.

"What is his name?"

"John Sandford, sir. He was brought here almost insensible last night, and I am so anxious to know how he is. Oh! what's that?" cried Jenny, starting, "That" referred to a tremendous outcry which that moment resounded through the office; the outcry consisting of screams, oaths, kicks at doors, all sounding up from below, as if evil spirits were imprisoned, and were struggling to get free.

“That is our Sunday music, my dear,” said the policeman; “we call that our morning hymn. Not quite so good though, is it, as ‘Awake my soul, and with the sun,’ to the tune of the ‘Old Hundredth’?” The noise still continuing, and noticing the child’s pale and frightened face, he added, “You needn’t be afraid,—they can’t get out; they are the prisoners in the cells.”

“And is father” — one of them, she was going to say, but she could get no farther, and broke out sobbing.

“Now don’t go fretting your little heart to pieces, there’s a good child. And if you will be advised by me, you will go home and rest quietly till to-morrow. Your father is no worse than the rest. Most of them have the horrors this morning, and he has his share.”

“But can I not see him?”

“You can if you press, for that matter; but really you had better not; it will make him work, and you no better.”

Jenny thought the matter over for a minute or two. Then she said sadly, "I think you are right; I had better not see him;" and having been shaken kindly by the hand, by the good-hearted policeman, she sorrowfully walked home. Patience, Jenny! it will be a long Sunday, a very long one; but certainly the most eventful that has ever dawned on thy brief life. Go home, and let the blooming flower bring a ray of hope into thy desolate heart, a ray that shall have some promise in it, though feeble and glimmering as the light of stars.



CHAPTER VIII.

FLOWER-SEED IN CHALLONER'S COURT.

Sow on in faith !

Sow the good seed ! another after thee
Shall reap. Hast thou not garnered many fruits
Of others' sowing, whom thou knewest not ?
The seed thou sowest, is it thine to say,
" I will or will not sow it," as it falls
Rife with all blessings from that fruitful cross,
That tree of life, rich with his blood ?

IN the afternoon, Mrs. Peters made her appearance in Challoner's Court, accompanied by Mat Freeman, dressed in his Sunday best, his black coat being adorned by a flower from his much-prized garden. As he walked with a rueful face up the court — for it was a great deal worse than he had expected to find it — the navvy's appearance might have been taken as a sturdy protest against the filth and squalor by which he was surrounded. More than one of those who were lounging at

the open doors and windows looked at him as if he belonged to another sphere, and half envied his bright and healthy face. Mat said nothing, but nodded here and there to any one who gazed particularly hard at him.

Mrs. Peters went from house to house ready to read words in season from the Book, and by-and-by both she and Mat were seated in John Sandford's room, listening to the sad story which Jenny had to tell. As she told it, Mat gazed tenderly at her, as he did upon the flowers in the garden at home. Even in this hour of sorrow, Jenny with a grateful heart thanked him many times for the geranium, and tried to tell him what a joy the flower had been to her amid days of darkness.

"That I can well believe," said the workman; "I never knew grandmother go anywhere, Mrs. Peters, without doing some good; and if that flower of yours, Jenny, does not win a prize in three weeks' time, my name is

not Mat Freeman. But I am not in the mind to talk much about flowers this afternoon, although I can't help saying," said Mat, with a bright, confident smile, "that if a flower were in every window in this abominable court, it would do some good."

"I suppose Challoner's Court is worse than the one you used to live in," said Mrs. Peters.

"A great deal," said Mat, heaving a big sigh. "I don't know how you feel, Mrs. Peters, and Maggie, and Jenny, but I feel as if I was going to be choked. I can't say what that great man the Apostle Paul felt, when his spirit was stirred within him as he saw Athens wholly given up to idolatry, but in my small way I feel something like him in looking upon this horrible court. I tell you what," said Mat, suddenly, "I must go out and sing; yes, I must." His listeners regarded him with surprise.

"But stop," he said, for he had started up to

carry out his determination, "let's have a little prayer-meeting first. 'Where two or three meet together in my name,'" he added, reverently — "you know the promise; and Challoner's Court, it seems to me, is just the place in which to plead the promise, and to expect its fulfilment."

Presently Challoner's Court witnessed a strange sight; four simple people, one of them blind and one of them a child, wrestling with God on behalf of the wretched people by whom they were surrounded! Mat had a remarkable "gift in prayer," and as his spirit was moved within him, the petitions he offered were as intense and earnest as strong feeling could make them.

Leaving his hat in the room, Mat Freeman went out, and advancing midway up the court, began to sing at the top of his voice —

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear."

The navvy had a clear, melodious voice, and his singing soon attracted some notice. Heads were thrust out of windows, slatternly women and unwashed men came to the doors, and a crowd of little children wonderingly gathered round him. Mat continued to sing as if simply for his own pleasure and profit. With closed eyes and clasped hands he went on with true heart-pathos in his melodious tones —

“ It makes the wounded spirit whole,
It calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary rest.”

He sang the hymn through, and then, as if he saw no one in the court but his heavenly Father, knelt down on the flagstones, and poured forth a prayer to God for the salvation of all in that place. Then planting himself against the blind wall of the court, he began to speak to the people at the doors and windows. He told them, in a simple, pathetic

way, his own history ; what a drunkard he had been, what sorrows he had inflicted on his wife and children, what temperance had done for him, and above all, what Jesus had done for him. Mat had a forcible style of speech, and being thoroughly sincere and earnest, he was at no loss for words. Mrs. Peters was astonished at the attention paid to him, and at the impression produced by his telling anecdotes and solemn appeals.

“I tell you what it is, mate,” said a rough costermonger, putting down his pipe, “you seem one of the right sort, you do : will you have a sup ?” said he, handing out a pewter measure with liquor in it.

“No, no, mate, thank you,” said Mat, kindly ; “never another sup of that poison passes my lips ;” and then he went on once more beseeching them to give up drinking, and not to ruin body and soul.

“Well, well ; no offence, no offence,” said

the costermonger. "What you have been saying is very good, no doubt, and we will hear you again, master, if you don't mind coming to talk to us."

A few nodded their heads, as if assenting to this proposal, and Mat, with a thankful heart, promised compliance. Entering Jenny's house once more, before any one could speak, he said, while a tear started in his eye, "Oh let us pray again for these poor sheep without a shepherd!"

In the midst of her trouble about her father, Jenny could not help confessing that she had never spent so happy an afternoon. "You seem to have brought hope with you to this terrible place, Mr. Freeman," she said.

"Why, look you," said the navvy, taking her little hand in his own giant clasp, "if that little flower of yours can live in a place like this, is it not a sign that God does not keep away from it? that is what a flower says to me in any place, however poor, Jenny."

"I certainly think," said Mrs. Peters, "that something may be done in this place by preaching, as well as by Bible-reading, and if you will" —

"Preach!" roared Mat, with astonishment, "I never did such a thing in my life; I never could; but, God helping me, I will come and talk to these poor fellows as often as I can."

Mrs. Peters thought such talking as Mat's that afternoon was the best kind of preaching, and it was with new hope that she contemplated her work in Challoner's Court now that he had promised his assistance.

"Keep up a good heart, Jenny, my child," the navvy said, in bidding her good-by. "I shall now go off and see your father."

Jenny almost jumped for joy as Mat said this, and half wished to go with him.

"No, no," he said: "I may have a few words to say to him that he had better hear by himself." And so he went away, while Jenny

in simple faith remained behind, praying that God would go with him.

Mat was readily permitted an interview with John Sandford. He found him, as the policeman had told Jenny in the morning, undergoing a fit of the "horrors." The drunkard's fearful thirst was consuming him, and he looked up at his visitor with a bloodshot eye. The agony he had that morning endured, no pen can describe, and it was heightened by the thought that not until the morrow, and perhaps not even then, (oh, how little he knew what would be on the morrow!) could he obtain any alcoholic stimulant. He was a little moved by Mat's visit, and in a few words expressed his thanks. Amongst all his drinking companions, not one had given him a thought that day, not one had appeared to bail him out, or to ask whether he was alive or dead. And here was a complete stranger to him, coming to speak words of kindness and sympathy! He was

fallen very low, but what little life there was left in his heart quivered at the thought of Mat's goodness.

"I know very well what you have been feeling all day, John Sandford," said Mat. "I once had a fit of the horrors, and I think any man who has had them ought in some measure to know what hell is."

"It is hell," groaned the drunkard.

"Yes, you have, like the rich man in the parable, been groaning under a fiery thirst. You have had the thirst, but not the means of gratifying it."

"Don't mock me," said Sandford; "it's bad enough to endure without that."

"Mock you! you poor man; no, no," said Mat humbly, "that is very far from my thoughts. In fact, John Sandford, I came to help you if I could. If I were sure you would not drink any more, I would bail you out at once, and send you home to comfort poor Jenny."

Had Mat Freeman been watching John Sandford while he thus spoke, he would have seen a gleam in his eye which would have made him hesitate before carrying out this generous proposal; but he was thinking of Jenny's desolate condition, and of the joy it would be to her to have her father home that night, and did not notice the excited, eager look with which his words had been received.

"I have been to-day to Challoner's Court, and I have been thinking since what good one or two teetotallers might do in the place."

O you good honest Mat, as frank as your own sweet flowers, do look at the drunkard's face! But he did not, and went on, "If you will sign the pledge when you get home to-night, I'll bail you out."

"I promise you I will do it," answered Sandford.

"Very well then: I shall have to go home and get the money, but I will not be long

gone ;” and shaking hands with him, he left him.

The narrator of this little story must here interpose by saying that he has arrived at the saddest portion of it. Fain would he have had matters turn out as Mat Freeman wished them. He would like to have seen John Sandford repairing home with a grateful heart, ready to meet Jenny with a word of welcome, and to fill her heart with glad surprise upon her return from the house of God. This was what Mat Freeman had fondly dreamed would come to pass upon the released drunkard's solemn assurance. He had promised to call in to take John Sandford's pledge, and to have a little chat with him and Jenny. What he discovered when he called, the next chapter must reveal. Mat has many times since said that he would never bail another drunkard out on Sunday.

“It's better to be sure of his keeping sober

till the next day ; locked up, he can't get to the drink ; let out he may, as in the case of John Sandford. However, Providence does in a very wonderful way bring good out of evil ; He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him. That's all I can say about that business of bailing out John Sandford to this day."



CHAPTER IX.

THE GERANIUM IN DANGER.

What has earth for me ?
No bright sky above me,
Not one to love me —
Earth has nought for me !
Whither shall I go ?
Life is dark and dreary,
Hope is sick and weary,
Every thing is woe !

TRUE to his promise, a little after eight on Sunday evening Mat Freeman entered John Sandford's room in Chalonier's Court. Instead of finding Jenny and her father, as he had expected, he saw Jenny weeping, and blind Maggie endeavoring to soothe her.

“Have you seen your father, Jenny?” asked Mat ; “I expected to find him here.”

“No ; he hasn't been let out, has he ?”

“Yes, I bailed him out myself a short time ago, and I told him I was coming on here.”

“Then, Maggie,” said Jenny, passionately, “you may depend upon it he has taken it.”

“Taken what?” said Mat.

“Why, the poor child’s geranium is gone,” answered Maggie. “When we came back just now, we missed it; nobody has ever laid a finger on it before, bad as the court is. I am afraid, if the child’s father has been home, he has taken it.”

Mat was greatly taken aback at this news. To a loving father like himself, it seemed an impossibility that Sandford could, in gratifying his propensity for drink, descend to so low a deep as to outrage his child’s feelings in this way. Jenny, on the other hand, now that she knew how generously Mat had acted in releasing her father, was afraid lest this act of his—for she only too truly had surmised who the real culprit was—should cause the navy, in

disgust, never to come near their dwelling again; and without knowing why, she had begun to cherish the hope, — a hope indeed feeble as the smoking flax, — that his influence over her father would do what all her tears and prayers and patience had failed to bring about. She began earnestly to plead with Mat not to forsake them.

“I am a poor fellow to forsake any one, Jenny,” he said in reply. “I am not accustomed to expect much from poor drunkards; I look upon drink with them as a disease, and I pity them as I would a sick or dying person. I don’t mind so much the money I spent in getting him out, but I am disappointed; I had hoped something so different; but then, you know, I had no business to do that, and I am to blame, if any one is.”

“Oh, don’t say that,” said Jenny; “it was so good of you; and if mother can know what you have done, and if she was an angel, allowed

to come and visit you, she would do it, I know, with the smile that she often has on her face when she comes to me."

"Suppose," said Maggie, "you run over to the 'Grapes,' Mat, and see whether he is there."

"Ah, that's a good thought," replied Mat, starting up; "and, Jenny, you come with me. It's a long time, thank God! since I entered a public-house, and I never intended crossing the threshold of one again; but"—his face becoming stern and determined—"I'll go, and if I find that Spivens has purloined one of grandmother's pets, I will give him a piece of my mind."

While Mat and Jenny are hurrying down the street to the "Grapes," the reader may advance before them a little way. After John Sandford had been released from the station-house, the craving for drink, under which he had been groaning all the day, had become

uncontrollable when he once more found himself in the neighborhood of the "Grapes." There was the drink within his reach at last! But he had no money; and to appear before the bar without money, he knew, would be useless. Mrs. Spivens, however, cultivated "aristocratic" tastes, and took, or pretended to take, great interest in flowers. No doubt, if she saw Jenny's geranium, she would at least give him a little liquor for it. Consumed as he was by this drunken thirst, he was capable of no reflection; he was ready to commit any crime. There are thousands of drunkards in London, prepared, by their habitual intemperance, for any enormity, however startling. The reader is of course ready to despise such a poor, forceless weakling as John Sandford; but it should not be forgotten that he is a type of tens of thousands of his class, who, through the influence of drink, are ready for any criminality.

John Sandford, like a guilty creature, sneaked out of his house with Jenny's geranium in his hand, but it was some time, after all, before he entered the "Grapes." His whole body was trembling with excitement, his lips and tongue were parched, his eyes were bloodshot, and he stood before the bar the image of the wreck and ruin that he was.

"Why, you never mean to say that you have brought Jenny's flower here!" said the costermonger who in the afternoon had offered Mat "a sup" out of his measure. "Well, Sandford, I thought you could do things pretty tidy, but this beats me and everybody else hollow. What are you going to do with it? This is not the show, is it?" and the man laughed a hard, bitter laugh.

"I want to sell it for her," said Sandford, in a husky voice.

"Yes, twice; but my opinion is — mind, no offence — my opinion is, it's very little of the money that she will see."

“What do you mean?” said the other, savagely.

“Can’t speak any plainer, that I know of,” said the costermonger, “or else I would; but I would rather give you a drop of drink than that you should sell Jenny’s flower.”

“Ah, Sandford, you here again,” said Mrs. Spivens, grandly arrayed in her dazzling Sunday attire. Mrs. Spivens had guessed, only too truly, that the poor wretch had no money to spend. She could see at a glance that he had brought the geranium for a drop of poison, which in her vocabulary was dignified by the name, “choice compounds,” or “cream of the valley.”

“Well, I suppose you want a drop of gin for that thing?” she said. “Hand it over; I am very fond of flowers.”

“Specially gin blossoms,” said the costermonger, in rather a loud whisper.

Sandford handed over the flower with a trembling hand and ashy face.

“Give that man a drop of gin,” she said to her husband, shaking her snaky curls.

“No you DON’T!” thundered a voice at that instant, and in the same moment a grasp more firm than polite seized the flower-pot from her hand. Mat Freeman grasped the geranium securely in one hand, while with the other he held poor Jenny’s trembling little fingers. If the ghost of his dead wife had risen on the scene, John Sandford could not have looked more petrified.

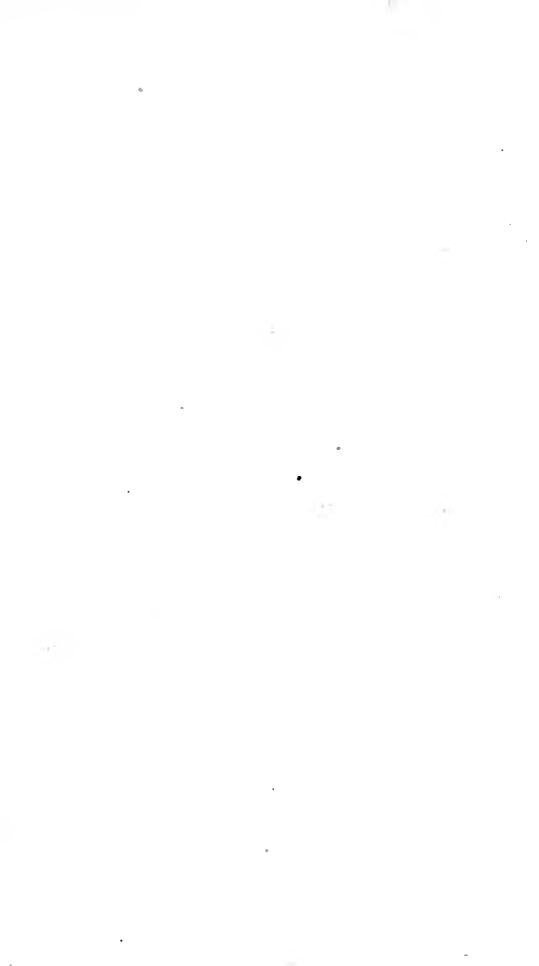
“Bravo! master,” cried the costermonger, excitedly; “that’s what I call good; will you take a sup now? I’d give you, a dozen, and welcome, for this trick.”

“What’s all this? what’s all this?” said the landlord, pompously.

“I am sorry to do any thing unpolite to a lady, but I have just recovered a flower for its owner, publican, that’s what I have done.”

“That flower is mine” said Mrs. Spivens, spitefully and indignantly.





“ Very sorry you have become a receiver of stolen goods, ma’am,” said Mat ; “ though it’s not the first time by a good many,” he went on sadly, “ when I consider the honest earnings that have gone from this side of the counter to yours.”

“ What do you mean, sir, eh ? ” said the landlord, scarcely able to speak for rage ; “ what do you mean, eh ? That flower is my wife’s ; Sandford sold it her.”

“ No, no, I can’t believe that ; he wouldn’t be so bad as that ; it would be to hurt the dead like, to have done that. Look here, publican,” he continued, with a rugged eloquence all his own ; “ you can’t understand what this flower has been to Jenny. It has been a sweetness and a joy to a poor orphan child during many a dreary day ; it has whispered to her tenderly of the dead and of the better land ; she has talked to it when she has had no one else to speak to ; it has grown under her eyes ; it is

hers. But why do I speak such words to the like of you? I might just as well speak in a foreign language. All I know is that it is Jenny's geranium, and you shan't take it from her."

A murmur of applause arose from those assembled in front of the bar, who liked to hear the landlord get this "dressing," as they expressively called it.

"John Sandford, man," said the navvy, kindly, "speak up; say you never meant to part with Jenny's flower."

The man thus addressed was becoming every moment more ashy in hue. He breathed heavily and with difficulty, as if he was choking. The room seemed to be turning round with him, and his face was expressive only of mortal terror. He gazed vacantly at Mat, then at his daughter, and the next moment with a gasping shriek fell heavily against the stalwart chest of the navvy in a deathlike swoon.

“ Ah ! better so, a thousand times,” said the navvy, quietly ; “ better that he should die right out now, than he should touch a drop more liquor. Here, Jenny, child, take the flower, and run home ; never fear, I’ll bring your father all right.”

Jenny, pale with fright, stood as one transfixed.

“ Come on, Jenny,” said the costermonger, kindly ; “ I’ll see you and the flower safe home ;” and at length they went out together.

“ Fetch a policeman,” said the landlord, savagely, to the potboy.

“ Ah, do,” cried Mat, moving with his senseless burden to the door ; “ fetch fifty ; it’s such houses as yours as makes so many of them necessary. I shall be within hail ; I’m only going to take this poor fellow to the door for a breath of air. The atmosphere of this poison-hole is enough to smother a thousand people.”

The publican stamped with rage to find

himself thus bearded on his own ground; and as for Mrs. Spivens's curls, if they had been real snakes, they would have whirled about like so many fiery serpents inflicting deadly mischief on people in general.

"Now, policeman," said Mr. Spivens, "this lady has something to tell you." But Mrs. Spivens, when she had to explain why the guardian of the peace had been sent for, found it rather a difficult task, and she could only say spitefully that Mat had accused her of being a receiver of stolen goods.

"That," said the policeman, sententiously, "is *slander*, ma'am; but I can't take people up for that; if I had to take up every one that slandered his neighbor, ma'am, I should have enough to do. 'You have your remedy elsewhere,' as the magistrate frequently says."

There really was no charge to bring against Mat Freeman. John Sandford had not been served with any liquor, and the flower was still

Jenny's. From a certain grim smile which gathered round the corners of Mat's mouth, it is more than questionable whether he would have parted with one of "grandmother's pets," if John Sandford had sold it ten times over.

Procuring assistance, Mat carried the unconscious man home, and laid him down gently on his bundle of rags. Then telling Jenny that he would not be long gone, and bidding her sprinkle her father's face with cold water, and to "keep up her heart, for a great deal depended on her now," the kind-hearted navvy, a very Samaritan truly to one who had fallen among thieves, hastened off to Dr. Adam, a medical practitioner, well known for the benevolent interest he took in the recovery of drunkards.

Dr. Adam fortunately was at home, and at once, feeling an interest in one who had strongly aroused the best sympathies of the navvy, set out for Challoner's Court. Alas ! it was the

old story. John Sandford had recovered from his swoon, but was now in a raging delirium. We draw a veil over that sad, dark night, the darkest in poor Jenny's history. All through the long, stifling night she watched her father lying where her mother had lain down to die, and every now and then heard him calling out her name as if she was yet alive.



CHAPTER X.

RENT-DAY IN CHALLONER'S COURT.

There's a low-roomed house in a ruinous street;
There filth and penury lovingly meet,
And the cobwebbed roof, and the rotting wall,
And the rag-stifled casement dark and small,
Are unheeded there, among many more —
So wretched the homes of the wretchedly poor!

“**N**OW, it's no use arguing the matter with me. I am not the person to be argued with. I am only Challoner's agent, and if you have any thing to say, you must say it, to him. I want your money; that's all I want of you. Here you owe a month's rent, and you must pay it: if you can't, I must take proceedings, and out you must go.”

Such were the words of little Mr. Wrench, delivered many times with spiteful emphasis, as, book in hand, he went from house to house on

Monday morning in Challoner's Court. The poor people dreaded Monday morning, and with good reason might have called it "Black Monday." Frequently, if a wife had managed to put by the weekly rent, her savage husband would succeed in wresting it from her on Sunday, and the Monday came finding him drunk, the wife in despair, and the rent collector pitiless.

Then the court would resound with angry arguments between collector and tenants.

"'Old Screw' can well afford to do without his rent," would be the favorite argument employed. He ought to be ashamed of asking any rent for such a hole as this; look at the flooring all rotting away. Let him come and ask for it himself; we would give him a black draught of the poisoned water we have to drink, and ask him how he liked it."

"Now, it's no use," the collector would reply; "you know you stop here because you

have nowhere else to go. I have nothing to do with you but to get your rent, and that I must have, or out you must go."

For two hours and more the collector had been engaged in this kind of argument, amid every kind of noise and confusion, when Jenny, with a beating heart, saw him approach her door. Her father was lying on his bundle of rags, as if in that last sleep from which there was no awaking. What could she say to Mr. Wrench? How could she induce him to wait for the rent? If her blooming geranium would have realized half what they owed, much as she loved it, she would willingly have sold it, and have resigned for ever all the little dreams in which she had indulged of her flower going to the show.

"Well," said the collector, entering, "you know what I want, and I hope you are ready for me. You owe more than two weeks' rent; but though they call me a hard wretch in the

court, I don't want to be hard on *you*, and if you pay two weeks, you can stop; if not, I am of course sorry for you, but out you must go," said the little collector, closing with his favorite phrase.

Jenny burst into tears, and pointed to her father.

"Yes, that is what I see in most rooms," said Mr. Wrench; "it is Monday morning, you know, and I don't expect to find people sober."

"Poor father is very ill; he is indeed, sir; he is not drunk," said the child, blushing.

"Has been, I suppose, and this is the result of it. Well, I can't stand here arguing; if you can't pay two weeks, you can't pay three, and out you must go," said Mr. Wrench, with a little emphatic jerk.

There was a feeble footstep heard in the passage, and the next moment blind Maggie groped her way in.

“ Good morning, Mrs. Maggie,” said the collector ; “ as you are here, I may as well take your rent.”

“ I have it ready, thank the Lord,” said the widow ; “ here it is, and here is the book. Jenny, see that he puts the figures down right.”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Maggie ; I never have any trouble with you. I wish all in the court were like you, — I should get through my work a great deal quicker.”

“ Mr. Wrench,” said the widow in a trembling voice, and taking hold of Jenny’s hand, “ can you not take pity on poor Jenny here ? Look at her to-day, with a dying father before her eyes. We shall all have to lie down helplessly like him when our hour comes ; and it will be pleasant then to think of any deed of mercy we were permitted to perform towards any poor sorrowful creature. Have pity on them ! ”

“ Oh, I have plenty of pity myself,” said the

collector, "if people did but know. It's Chal-loner, you know, not me, that you have to blame."

"Look here," said the widow, holding out her trembling hand; "here is one week's rent for them; it's all I have; I would give you the two if I had them. Accept the widow's mite, Mr. Wrench, and let the poor things alone."

"O Maggie! Maggie!" was all that Jenny could say, as the good widow thus pleaded for her.

"Now, I am about to do a very foolish thing," said the collector, after a pause; "I'm about to do a very foolish thing; but never mind: I won't take your money, Maggie, and I won't take proceedings; but don't say any thing about it in the court, I beg of you."

"God bless you, sir," said Jenny, fervently.

"Well, I hope things will mend with you; I will take one smell at that geranium, if you will allow me."

Jenny held up the flower for him ; and the collector, saying that it was “something” to smell a flower like that in such a place, went away, followed by the child’s grateful thanks. The widow would not allow any thanks on Jenny’s part. She said she had simply done her duty, and that Jenny would have done as much for her any day.”

“That I would,” said Jenny, kissing her colorless cheek ; “but I shall never be able to pay you.”

“Never is a long day, my child,” said the widow.

On that same Monday morning, Mat Freeman attended the police-court to answer his bail, as he called it ; and judging by the temperance speeches which he has since delivered, his visit to the court that morning made an indelible impression on his mind. His healthy, stalwart appearance amongst the poor sodden creatures brought up before the magistrate,

attracted the attention of more than one in the court. With feelings of the deepest sorrow he heard case after case, and watched the people who were in charge of the police. There were workmen of his own age, from whose countenances all human compassion and manly feeling had vanished, brought up for beating their wives and children, for fighting and brawling, and in every case drink was the provoking cause. Women were there with bruised faces, bandaged heads, and other marks of cruelty on them; and here, too, it was the vice of drunkenness which had kindled the rage of those from whose violence they were suffering. There were mere boys and girls, Mat saw with a strong shudder, charged with the same vice; and the policeman who had them in charge said that juvenile intemperance, especially on Sunday evenings, was greatly on the increase. Mat heard them "sentenced" one after another, and when John Sandford's name was called, stood up before the magistrate.

"If you please, your worship," he said, "I fear he will be wanted in another court before night."

"What do you mean?" asked the magistrate.

Mat detailed the circumstances under which he had left John Sandford on the preceding night, and then added solemnly, "At any moment he may have to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ."

"Well," said the magistrate, "you did a kind thing to a brother workman; you are released from your bail."

"Please, your worship," said Mat, encouraged by the kindly tone of the magistrate, "you have been granting summonses this morning."

"You don't look as if you wanted to take out a summons against any one," returned the magistrate, smiling.

"I should like to do so, nevertheless," said Mat; "I would summon all the publicans in

London to appear before your worship this morning to receive their deserts, as I feel sure you would measure them out."

The magistrate, seeing that he had a "character" before him, and not unwilling to vary the dreary monotony of a Monday morning's sitting — "Black Monday" to him as well as to the poor tenants of Challoner's Court — allowed him to proceed.

"Yes, I would," continued the navvy, bringing down his clenched right hand into the open palm of his left with a sounding smack. "I can't have been here the last hour without seeing what is the root of all the mischief which has come before you, sir. 'Tis the public-houses. They make brutes of the men, and poor, frightened, hunted hares of the women and children. Homes might now be bright and happy, but for them. Children might now be at school learning to do their duty in that station of life into which God has pleased to

call them, but for them. Earnings might go into the savings bank, and a rainy day might be provided for, but for them. Churches and chapels might be filled every Sunday, but for them; and therefore, your worship, I should like the keepers of gin-shops, beer-shops, and public-houses in general to appear before you, that you might give them fourteen days, or as much longer as the law would allow you."

"The longer the better, I suppose," said the magistrate, who had been pleased with Mat's earnestness. "Yes, sir. I can't see why, sir," he went on, as if the most perplexing problem was knitting his brain into knots, "I can't see why these poor creatures should have the fourteen days, and the publicans get nothing except comfort and luxury."

The colloquy between him and the friendly magistrate here ended. Will the day ever dawn when Mat's reasoning shall be calmly looked at? In other crimes, not only the


principals are dealt with by the law, but those who are accessory to their commission. In respect to drunkenness, however, a publican may sell that which is the provoking cause of almost every crime dealt with by the law, and yet no one thinks, as Mat said, of summoning *him*. He is a "respectable" man, can drive his brougham or dog-cart, and have his snug suburban residence ; but the man whom he has helped to inebriate may roll in the gutter, or be locked up, or get fourteen days' hard labor. There are many besides Mat Freeman who would be glad to take out summonses against these "old offenders."



CHAPTER XI.

COMING TO HIMSELF.

And love o'er the unsightly face,
To its old magic true,
Shed colored floods of softened light
To please the father's view.
She read and sang to win his ear,
And often would he bless
The voice that seemed the lingering sprite
Of her dead loveliness.

OR several days it was uncertain whether John Sandford would live or die. Dr. Adam, whom Mat had called in to his assistance, was unremitting in his attentions, watching the case with the benovolent interest which he brought with him to every drunkard's sick-bed he visited. He was one of those medical men who strongly set his face, under all circumstances, against alcoholic stimulation. He listened with a smile of incredulity to all his brethren had to say about

drink being necessary. Amongst his rich patients he would doubtless have been more popular if he had blandly recommended a glass of old sherry now and then, or a little, of course only *a little*, brandy and soda-water or bitter beer, for weak stomachs. He had lost several patients by his unswerving integrity; but in more than one instance he had been recalled, when, notwithstanding the use of alcohol, those who had declined his further attendance grew worse instead of better.

Dr. Adam was not long in perceiving, from the conversation of Jenny, and from the refinement of the child's ways and tastes, that John Sandford had once seen better days. With great delicacy, as the unhappy drunkard recovered some mental balance, he adapted his conversation, even the tones of his voice, to the condition, not of a poor imbruted creature, but of one who had formerly sympathized with better things. Sandford had not thus been

addressed for weeks and months; never, indeed, since his wife died. He had been content to be a drunken workman, incapable of any intellectual or religious effort. He now found himself thinking of what he was before drink had woven its galling net around him. Old thoughts and feelings came crowding back upon his mind, and he cried with grief and shame over the wreck and ruin he had become.

Dr. Adam allowed these thoughts to work and have their full influence, watching his patient as conscientiously and tenderly as if he was to receive a hundred-guinea fee; or, better still, as if in anticipation he heard the words of the Master, "Whosoever converteth a sinner from the error of his way, saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins."

It happened that Jenny could not make her ornaments quick enough. Day after day Maggie brought home good returns, and in some instances people gave double for her ornaments

what Maggie asked. The doctor and Mat professed to have nothing to do with this good fortune, although in after days they were strongly suspected of having had the principal hand in it. It thus fell out that the sick man was enabled to have a few comforts; and when the next "Black Monday" came round, it was with a smile of hope that Jenny was enabled to pay Mr. Wrench one week's rent. Mrs. Peters was a daily visitor of the sick man, saying as usual, at the end of every visit, "Let us read a chapter together." Mat looked in every evening, and he and the doctor conversed together in a manner that was as interesting to the sick man as it was to Jenny.

"Jenny," said Mat one evening with glee, "what do you think? You remember Jem Banks, who brought you home that night?"

"Oh yes, very well! he never goes by without giving me a nod."

"Well, I do believe," said Mat, firmly,

“that there are better days even for Challoner’s Court. Jem has signed the pledge, and I have given him one of grandmother’s pets,” cried the navvy, with a cheerful laugh, which he immediately subdued. “Yes,” he went on, “I do think that God has blessed what few words I have said; at any rate, Jem met me last night, and after some hesitation, came out with a mighty resolution that he would give up drinking. He said he should never in his life forget bringing you and the flower home,” said the navvy, lowering his voice. “So I have given him one; and now there are two of grandmother’s pets in Challoner’s Court.”

All this time — and it was now more than nine days since he had been brought home insensible from the “Grapes” — John Sandford had remained without alcoholic stimulant. Dr. Adam had explained to him that if he valued his life, he must submit implicitly to his orders. He was too weak and ill to resist, even if he

had desired to do so, but, to his exceeding joy, he offered no opposition. On the contrary, his mind was racked with remorse in recollection of the evils which his passion for drink had brought upon him. He might have continued unfortunate in business, he thought, but he need not have darkened this misfortune by the effects of his intemperance, he need not have embittered his wife's last days, he need not have wounded his only child as he had done. He thought of the night his wife died, and she had gone away from the world happy in the conviction that he would become a changed man. In the world of spirits, did they know what went on in this dim spot, earth, in which they once lived? And did *she* know that he had been faithless to his word? Had *she* seen that he had been in his own sad history since all her death, all that he had been in the way of neglect and unkindness to poor Jenny? As these thoughts recurred to him many times, he

covered his face, and tears, to which he had long been a stranger, flowed down his cheeks. Then his thoughts became sadder still when he remembered how, in his mad career of passion and intemperance, he had forgotten God. Once he had read his Bible, loved the sabbath, enjoyed prayer. What a dark yawning gulf there was between what he had been and what he was ! Drink had made that fearful chasm ; and as he thought of its height and depth and darkness, despair — dark and chilling — took full possession of his soul.

But all the time that these dark thoughts held him prisoner, his daughter's ministrations to his slightest wants were of the gentlest character. She talked soothingly to him, as if he was of her own age, yet with all the loving reverence of a child for the best of fathers ; she brought her work near his poor bed, and while her fingers were nimbly and dexterously busy, she chatted about things that would interest him,

until the father was obliged to close his eyes, she so reminded him of her who had gone. Many a time in simple faith did the child lift up her heart in prayer to God, that her father might recover, and that he might never again give way to drunkenness. This, too, was the father's own prayer. One of those marvellous changes of thought and feeling had passed over him which we can never explain, never understand, logicise about them as we will. He had come to himself, and, with strong crying and tears, was now seeking out a place for repentance.

As under Dr. Adam's skilful treatment he gradually grew better, Jenny found herself dreading his going out once more into old scenes of temptation and among his companions in sin. What if he should give way again? what if his present repentant state of mind should be like the morning cloud and early dew? She could not bear to contemplate the consequences of his reverting once more to his old habits.

One evening—it was the first evening he had sat up so long—Mat came in, as usual, after having had “a few words with the Court,” as he said, and John Sandford was sitting, pale and emaciated, looking at Jenny’s flower, and thinking of that terrible night when he had taken it to the “Grapes” to barter away for even a mouthful of spirits.

“I shall never be able to repay you for all your kindness,” he said to Mat: “but I hope to be a better man than ever I have been yet.”

“That is well said, my friend,” returned his companion. “I like to see a good hope in a man; it brings light and joy along with it, like the rising sun.”

“There is one thing I want to do at once,” said John Sandford, “and that is to fulfil the promise I made you when you so generously bailed me out. I want to sign the pledge.”

Jenny gave a very cry of delight, and Mat Freeman clapped his great hands with intense satisfaction.

“I have received,” he said, taking out his pledge-card, which he eyed affectionately, “many a man’s signature in the course of the last two or three years ; but I never received any one’s with so much joy and thankfulness as I shall receive yours. It’s the right thing for you to do ; I am sure you will say so when you have been a total abstainer as long as I have.”

With a trembling hand John Sandford signed his name ; and to this day on Mat Freeman’s card the signature may be seen beneath the curious scrawl of “Jem Banks.”

“May God help you to keep your pledge !” said Mat, reverently ; “and he will give you every day more and more strength to keep it, if you do but ask him.”

That was a very happy evening in Challoner’s Court. The voice of prayer was heard ascending from John Sandford’s dreary room.





CHAPTER XII.

THE CHOLERA IN CHALLONER'S COURT.

And they call it a fever,
Putrid or low;
But I and the weaver,
Both of us, know
That the fetid well-water, and steaming styes,
And the choked drains' gases, that unseen rise,
Subtle and still,
Sure and slow,
Certain to kill
With an unheard blow,
Are the fiends who poisoned that maiden's breath,
And cling to her still as she sleeps in death!

IT happened, as the reader has seen, that John Sandford's reformation took place at the same time that Mat Freeman was beginning to sow good seed in such a hard, barren soil as Challoner's Court; and the first thing that the navy did was to secure his friend's co-operation in the work. It was in vain that the other pleaded "nervousness," and asked for more time.

"I hold," said Mat, "that fat sinners ought not to make lean Christians ; and that if we have been mighty in the service of the devil, we must be just as mighty and valiant in the service of the Lord. Now Mrs. Peters is doing her work well, but she can't be in this court every day ; besides, I myself believe that we must have people sober before they can be brought to listen to the Gospel. Jem Banks has begun already, and I do believe that a few sober working men in this abominable court would make a great change in it. And who knows," said Mat, with a radiant smile, "but that we may see a flower in every window yet."

This enthusiastic hope of Mat Freeman's, not to deceive the reader, was never realized ; and yet, as time wore on, it was no unusual thing to find a flower blooming here and there, and always in the rooms of those who, through the energy of Mat Freeman or of John Sand-

ford, had been induced to become total abstainers. The reclaimed drunkard worked with a will in his self-imposed task of bringing his neighbors to temperance meetings, where he and others fairly wrestled with them until they had signed the pledge.

An event which occurred two or three weeks after John Sandford had signed the pledge only strengthened his own resolution, and gave additional emphasis to the solemn appeals which Mat Freeman from time to time made to those living in the court.

The cholera visited Challoner's Court, and nowhere did the fearful scourge fall heavier. For more than a month it cut down family after family, and Mr. Wrench almost found his occupation gone.

The horror of the court in those days can scarcely be described. No one would venture into it who was not compelled to do so. Of men, women, and children it might have been

said with truth, "In the morning they are like grass which groweth up, in the evening they are cut down and withered." It was in this dread time that Mat Freeman's addresses were listened to as they had never been listened to before. No one knew in the morning what would be his fate ere night. Mat went about from house to house, preaching temperance as the best preservative. John Sandford did the same. In their mortal terror many resorted to brandy from morning till night, selling almost their last rag to obtain the vile poison which was sold to them under this name. As a rule, those who took this course were among the first victims.

From pure benevolence, Dr. Adam was a frequent visitor to the court while the scourge lasted, and did all in his power to assist the poor people, and to restore them to something like calmness by his words of hope and encouragement. There was one thing, however, which he could not do. The epidemic was abating

somewhat of its fierceness, and fewer deaths were reported, when one morning poor Blind Maggie was stricken.

"I think, Jenny, child, I won't get up this morning," she said when Jenny, finding her late, went into her room. "I feel cold all over me."

Jenny looked at her, and to her horror she saw on her face that ashy look which she had so often seen of late on the faces of the dying.

"O Maggie! Maggie! you are not going to be ill, I hope?"

"I think I am, my child; but don't you fret now. I am in the Lord's hands, and whatever He does is for the best."

Before many minutes had elapsed, Dr. Adam was in the room. "Now, Doctor," said Maggie, in her tremulous voice, made more tremulous still by the pain she was suffering, "tell Jenny not to fret, she has been a dear child to me, and I am so glad that she can't miss me now."

“ Oh, I hope we are not going to lose you yet,” said the doctor, cheerily, but his face looked grave.

“ I think,” she faintly answered, “ that the course is finished at last. Like Jenny here, I believe in dreams, and once or twice lately I have dreamt that I saw my stall at the corner, and no one sitting in my chair. Yes,” she went on, dreamily, “ there was the stall, with its nets, and comforters, and Jenny’s ornaments, and the people came by, and some of them looked wonderingly to see all the things there, and poor old Blind Maggie not in her chair ! So I think that it won’t be long, and this sharp pain ”.—

Dr. Adam never went about at this time without carrying medicine with him, which he administered to Maggie as soon as he came. No medicine, however, could save her. The dread epidemic spared neither the aged nor the young, neither the sober nor the intemperate. In spite of all the measures he used, the disease

made rapid progress; and as it was evident that the aged widow could not survive the attack, the doctor gently broke the news to her. Even he was scarcely prepared for the serenity of mind with which Maggie received the tidings. She did not think so much about herself as of Jenny, and how she would feel when she was gone. All her efforts were directed to make the weeping child see that what had happened was for the best. They had been together so long, they had so truly loved each other, that the parting between them was not unlike that between mother and daughter.

“ You have so much to be thankful for, Jenny, in the midst of your sorrow about losing me. I might have been taken before your father had turned from the error of his ways, and then I should have died in sorrow; but when I see him so changed, and when I believe that it is lasting, I have nothing to grieve over. It's better to go to the house of many mansions

than to continue here in blindness and old age."

Ere long Maggie was unable to speak; she sank into a dose, from which she did not awake. The last words Jenny heard were words of gentle love towards herself, and simple, pious trust towards the Saviour.

"Ah!" said Mat, when, two or three hours after the last struggle, he stood in the death chamber, "she can now say, 'Whereas I was blind, now I see.' She has overcome the world, and has left old age, sorrow, and death forever behind her. She is on the other side of every thing hurtful and sinful. Oh, what a victory she has gained over us poor creatures!"

The death of Maggie made a more powerful impression upon John Sandford's mind than one would at first have deemed possible. It brought vividly to his recollection the night in which his wife had died. Again he saw her pale and suffering features, and remembered

the smile with which, in her last moments, she had cheered Jenny with the thought that her father was going to be so good. He never wavered in his resolution, although at times the old craving for drink returned ; he quenched it in the feeling of horror which the contemplation of his past life never failed to excite. He found too, in the work which he had undertaken in co-operation with Mat Freeman, an ever-failing source of gratification ; and often, when the love of drink began to assert its old seductive power over him, he would crush the first springs of the desire in resolute work amongst the poor drunken people around him. Gradually his room in Challoner's Court began to put on a different appearance. A decent bed took the place of the bundle of rags ; a table, a few chairs, and other little household comforts were added to his stock of furniture ; and Jenny's flower had, as Mat Freeman expressed it, "decent company to look at."

Meanwhile the annual flower-show day came and went by without Jenny becoming an exhibitor. The show was held when the fearful scourge was desolating Challoner's Court, and the child had no heart after Maggie's death to take even a day's pleasure. "Besides, I have won my prize," she said gratefully to Mat, "in seeing father what he is, and in seeing other poor people up the court following his example; I can have no better prize."

"Well, well, little one," answered Mat, "things are improving a little; several people have signed the pledge, and you may see a flower here and there. I don't expect to do much good in a place like this; it's almost impossible for people to think a pure, good thought in a fever nest such as this is. I should like to bring pickaxes and spades and a band of workmen to-morrow to pull it all down."

Something was being done, as Mat Freeman said, even in Challoner's Court; and the his-

tory of Jenny and her flower had more to do with it than she was aware of. Poor mothers, as they passed by, admired her tidy appearance ; and glancing into her room — no better than the rest in the court, but kept as clean as it could be kept — they felt a desire that their own children should look as bright, and that their own rooms should look as wholesome. Occasionally, too, the voice of a psalm was heard in her room, or the voice of prayer ; and some of the roughest and rudest men in the place as they walked by, were stirred by some dim remembrance of better things. So true is it that if one sinner destroyeth much good, one simple, Christian life, plant it where you will, begins to bloom, and to shed its fragrant and beneficent influence.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLOWER SHOW.

Open the lattice; let the fresh, soft air
Bear in sweet nature's psalm;
Draw the dim curtain quick, the sun is there,
Holy, and bright, and calm;
And here a heart trembles for very gladness,
Which yesternight fainted 'twixt hope and sadness.

TWELVE months had passed away since the death of Maggie, and the day had come round for holding another flower show in which the poor of Mat Freeman's district had an opportunity of exhibiting the flowers they had reared with so much industry and care. Never had the grounds of the charitable institution in which the show had been held two or three years successively looked more beautiful in their summer green. The trees looked fresh and shining, the flowers in the borders were in their glory, and to those

who daily looked out on festering courts and alleys, the place appeared as a garden of Eden. An instrumental band was discoursing popular melodies ; flags and banners were hung among the trees, and the grounds wore quite a festive appearance. A large tent had been erected, in which the flowers were exhibited, and groups of ladies and gentlemen, clergymen and professional men, moved slowly round the tent, admiring the display. But none of all the company, perhaps, enjoyed the scene as did the exhibitors themselves ; and as they heard exclamations of pleasure and surprise, that flowers so bright and glowing could have been reared in the dingy places from which they had been brought, their faces beamed with satisfaction.

A group of happy-looking persons might have been seen before a flower which was labelled "JENNY'S GERANIUM." The group consisted of Mat Freeman and his family, John Sandford and his daughter, Mrs. Peters and Jem Banks.

John Sandford had got on in life since we last saw him, and he and his daughter were "dressed like any gentlefolks," to quote Mat Freeman's enthusiastic expression. The flush of health had returned to his cheek, and Jenny was the picture of radiant happiness.

"I feel," said Mat, "that I want my fiddle; if I had that, I could express myself equal to the occasion. I have no words."

"Nor I, my friend," said John Sandford, grasping his hand; "but all the joy of this day I owe to you."

"I am a poor fellow to owe any thing to," said the other; "no, no; let the glory be given to Him who has brought it all about. Still I am thankful to connect your happiness with one of grandmother's pets," he added with a smile.

"But there is another pet of grandmother's here," said Jenny.

"What, you don't mean to say you have exhibited, Jem?" cried the navy.

“Yes, I have,” said Jem, somewhat bashfully.

“Well, that is good ; I never expected that.”

“And there are two or three flowers here from Challoner’s Court which are no relations to grandmother,” said Mrs. Peters, smiling. “Come and see them.”

Such was indeed the fact ; and no one in the company looked at them with a more tender eye, dimmed as it was by the tear of gratitude, than Mat Freeman’s little party. Mat had had many proofs during the last twelve months that his simple but earnest efforts in Challoner’s Court had not been in vain, and these flowers were now the touching evidences of it. The full results indeed of all his labors he was not permitted to see, for it became almost a natural consequence that as soon as a man became a teetotaller he moved out of Challoner’s Court into a better place of residence, as John Sandford had done months before this bright and happy afternoon.

As the evening drew on, a public meeting was formed under a shady knoll of trees, and then the prizes were distributed to the successful exhibitors. The gentleman who undertook this task discharged it with great kindness, saying that he had no doubt that while the exhibitors would value the prizes they now received, the flowers themselves had brought their own reward with them.

“Hear, hear!” cried Mat, vigorously.

“I see one here,” said the gentleman, smiling, and looking pointedly at Mat, “who could make an eloquent speech upon that subject.”

“No, no,” observed Mat, drawing back, somewhat abashed by the sight of such a company of ladies and gentlemen.

Presently the name “Jenny Sandford” was called, and, blushing like her own geranium, Jenny stepped forward, holding her father by the hand. Many looked surprised, because they thought the show was for poor people, and

not for those who could appear dressed as John and his daughter.

“I dare say,” said the chairman, “if we knew all, we should find that there was a history worth the knowing connected with every flower which has been exhibited to-day. We cannot tell all the industry, patience, and hope which have been exercised in connection with their training. One story, however, has been revealed to me, and I have been requested to tell it for the benefit of others, and it is the story of ‘Jenny’s Geranium.’”

Jenny and her father became at once the objects of the deepest attention.

“Jenny’s geranium,” the chairman went on, “first bloomed in a good man’s garden, whom I see before me ; from that garden it went to a dreary, miserable room in Challoner’s Court. There it became a joy and gladness past expression to a little orphan girl, who, while mourning the loss of a fond mother, had the additional

grief of a drunken father. Regardless of the interest which his daughter took in the flower, he one night took it to the public-house to sell, that he might obtain drink. The flower was rescued by the good man who first gave it to Jenny. There he is," said the chairman, pointing out Mat, when immediately a loud cheer arose.

"The father had a severe illness, from which he arose a new man, and that is the character in which he appears before you to-day."

Again the company broke out into hearty cheering.

"That is not all ; good example is catching : other flowers began to appear in Challoner's Court. Many people have been reclaimed from drunkenness, and Mat Freeman informs me, that he and John Sandford mean to keep on working until there is a flower in every window. I have now only to give you this prize, my child," said the chairman, very kindly, as

he handed her a beautifully bound Bible. "You are no stranger to this book; you have long loved it; the friends who knew your story thought a good deal as to what prize they should give you, but at last they came to the determination that they could give you nothing that you would more highly value than this."

Jenny, in almost a whisper, said, "that she could not have had a present that she would have liked better." The chairman then shook hands with her and her father, and they retired amid the hearty cheers of all present. Deep interest was felt in the exhibitors from Chaloners' Court (the chairman saying to those about him, "It's about the vilest place I know"); and when they had received their prizes, there were loud calls for "Mat Freeman."

"You see," said that burly individual, at length coming forward, a deep blush suffusing his honest features, "I am not accustomed to a

meeting like this. I could get on better in Challoner's Court. I am very glad, however, that Jenny has got a prize; I always said she would. I am very glad, also that other poor people in Challoner's Court have got prizes. Oh!" said Mat warming, and forgetting the audience before him, in the depth of his emotion, "if ever there was a place in London where a few flowers are needed, that place is Challoner's Court. You can't breathe in it almost for the foulness of the place, and yet, since the flowers have been there, they have done something to sweeten it. My creed is a very short one, ladies and gentlemen, and it's well known to many here; if you get teetotalism and flowers into the poorest house, you have introduced that which will bring about a wonderful change. I have seen the truth of this in numberless instances, and I shall keep on distributing grandmother's pets, and displaying my pledge-card (holding it up) as long as I live."

Mat retired amid great cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs. .

Two hours later there was a happy party in John Sandford's prettily furnished parlor. The window was open, and looked out on a larger garden than Mat Freeman's, but arranged somewhat in the same style.

A substantial tea had been discussed, and Jenny and her father, Mat Freeman and his wife, and Mrs. Peters, were enjoying a quiet talk with each other. Deep and tranquil was the happiness of the entire company. "I feel with you, Mr. Sandford," said Mrs. Peters, "that a few working-men preachers, like Mr. Freeman here, would, by God's blessing, soon put a different face upon many of our foul London courts."

"You know I am not a preacher," said Mat.

"We want," she went on, working men to talk to working men, and we want especially those who have got on in life, to become mis-

sionaries to their poor fallen companions, whom they leave behind."

"That's true," said Mat; "our men no sooner get on, than they forget the 'rock whence they were hewn,' and 'the hole of the pit whence they were digged.'"

"I have seen the good which Mr. Freeman has done in Challoner's Court."

"And am I not a living witness to it?" said John Sandford gratefully.

"Yes, and there are others too. I long to see the day when every converted working man shall say with regard to the unconverted masses of his own class, 'Lord, here am I; send me.'"

"Mrs. Peters," said Mat, solemnly; "what you have said about *my* work and *my* doing is neither here nor there; it is the Lord's work. But I am sure you are right with regard to the other matter."

They sat silently thinking for some time, and

then, ere the light had quite gone, Mrs. Peters said, "Shall we read a chapter together?" And afterwards Mat said, "Let us pray that what we have been talking about may come to pass."

THE END.











